

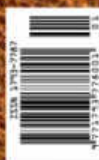
TRAVEL MEDIA OF THE YEAR
MEDIA PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION SINGAPORE

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TRAVEL WITHOUT BORDERS

Asia
Hidden Scenes & Cities

SPECIAL TRAVEL EDITION 2015-2016

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The Road Not Taken



*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.*

*Oh, I marked the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

By
ROBERT FROST



Architecture/
Landscape
Photographer
of the Year
2015

Winner: Kyaw Win Hlaing | Myanmar
U Pain Bridge
Settings: ISO 100, f/10.0, 1/250

**SUBMISSIONS
OPENING
SOON!**

People Photographer of the Year 2016

This category takes in portraits and persons in Asia, reflecting one of Asia's greatest offering, the warmth and beauty of its people.

Environmental Photographer of the Year 2016

One of the most important constitutions of ASIAN Geographic is conservation. Paying homage to this very important aspect of the geographic, this category hopes to highlight some of the most relevant conservation issues. Photos must be taken within the Asian region.

Architecture/ Landscape Photographer of the Year 2016

From the most iconic Asian representation to the most distinctive of Nature's architecture, the category welcomes the best look at Asia's structural designs, manmade or otherwise.

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2016

Some of the most unique and rarest of wildlife exist in Asia, topside and underwater. This category looks at some of the best wildlife found in the vast region of Asia.

Youth Photographer of the Year 2016

No matter where you're from in the world, you are eligible to enter in this category if:

- You are below 21 on date of submission (proof of age is mandatory with submissions)
- Photos are of Asia (see UN Geoscheme of Asia region)

Gallery Showcase

Winners of the Asian Geographic Images of Asia Photography Competition 2016 will be showcased in galleries across Singapore.

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Seal Bay

FROM ONE ISLAND TO ANOTHER

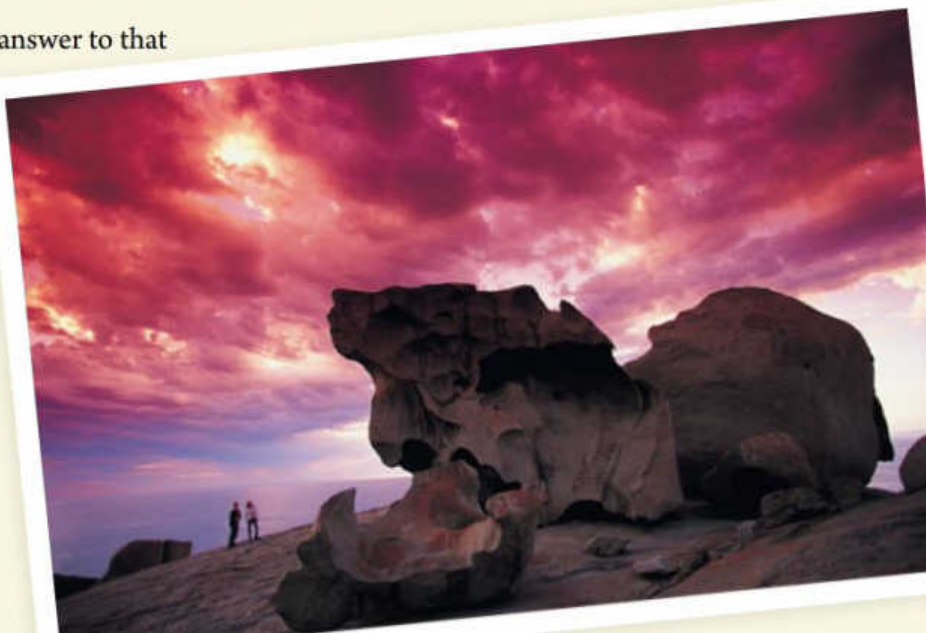
Hoppin' Around Kangaroo Island

The one island that gives Australia an edge over most across the globe is the one that has to be on your must-visit list. Nothing represents Australia better than one that is eponymous with the **Land Down Under's** endemic marsupial.

Kangaroo Island may just be your answer to that perfect destination that will give you all the stunning wildlife you can imagine, with the luxurious freedom of four-wheel driving into the golden sunset, towards lush Nature fused with celebrated world-class lodges, all sensitively designed to float amongst the untouched drama of safari.

Kangaroo Island's commanding spectacular ocean, beach and wilderness views make it the most accessible haven away from city bustle, all just 25 minutes from Adelaide by flight.

By Jenifer Yeo





Kangaroo Island Marine Tour

• **Region: North Coast & Heartland**

1 **Andermel Marron Farm**

Some 40 odd years ago marron were introduced to the creeks of Kangaroo Island and they have bred and multiplied ever since. Andermel is one of the larger commercial producing marron farms in Australia, which also offers you the opportunity to see them up close and understand the life cycle of this interesting crustacean. You can delight in marron, freshwater crayfish, an up market, boutique delicacy in restaurants and cafes. Alternately, farm gate sales allow you to take away marron of your choice to create your own feast.

The farm with these activities and experiences is located on Harriet Road in the Heartland of Kangaroo Island.



Andermel Maroon Farm

• **Region: Kingscote & Emu Bay**

2 **Kingscote Wharf**

On the water's edge behind the Kangaroo Island Penguin Centre of Kingscote Wharf – wait on the north side at 5pm – you'll see a flock of wild pelicans coming in to land, all eager for a treat. It's where the "Pelican Man" does his thing. This is home to not only South Australia's oldest European settlement, but to a colony of the smallest penguins in the world, all residing in the largest town on Kangaroo Island.



Kingscote Wharf

• **Region: Western Kangaroo Island**

3 Admirals Arch

One of Kangaroo Island's most impressive and unusual natural landmarks, this awesome scenery took thousands of years of erosion to create – its pièce de résistance is the distinctive rock bridge near the Cape du Couedic Lighthouse on the island's southwest coast. The boardwalk leading to the Admirals Arch is nearly as scenic as the landmark itself. Additionally, look out for the Remarkable Rocks, which is the other iconic landscape on Kangaroo Island.

Admirals Arch



• **Region: South Coast**

Seal Bay

No stay on Kangaroo Island is complete without a visit to the Seal Bay Conservation Park. Be awed by Australian sea lions resting and nursing their young, or riding the waves onto the beach.

Little Sahara

Discover sand, sand and more sand in this unique inland desert, and then sandboard and toboggan on the dunes! It'll be an unforgettable ride over rolling sea of white peaks and valleys beyond.. How else would you experience this heritage area?

Vivonne Bay



Vivonne Bay

Voted one of Australia's top beaches, it's even famed for its cray fishing – numerous boats leave and arrive at the town's jetty with a fresh catch. There are even picnic and barbeque areas set up at the jetty for you to experience the sweet taste of the blue.

Getting there

Kangaroo Island: A forty-minute ferry ride from the mainland, yet here, you'll feel a million miles away. From wineries to wildlife encounters, seafood to seafaring adventures, there's plenty to make your island escape unforgettable.

The magic's on your doorstep.

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- Sightseeing at Coffin Bay National Park
- Visit Port Lincoln National Park

4D Port Lincoln Ultimate Underwater Adventure \$3176 per couple

- 3 nights at 4.5* Port Lincoln Hotel with daily breakfast
- Cage diving with Great White Sharks
- Swim with Southern Bluefin Tuna
- Swim with Sea Lions.

Book now at www.australiatravelcentre.com.sg!



FAMILY FUN AT FRASERS MAKING MOMENTS COUNT

By Angelia Tan, with Lunita S V Mendoza

Outdoor swimming pool



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Stepping into this Mediterranean-style service apartment for a stay with the family was an exciting experience, yet one filled with slight trepidation, as I was hoping the children would take a shine to Fraser Place on Singapore's trendy Robertson Walk.

Seconds into taking in Frasers' spacious yet cosy three-bedroom terrace apartment, my eight-year-old announced his resounding approval after noting that all his favourite cartoon channels were on offer. For a parent, such an easy acceptance by a child is priceless.

A WORLD OF FAMILY FUN

To say that Fraser Place is conducive to a great atmosphere for families is an understatement. Within the apartment itself, it's wonderful to have a good size hall where family members gather to chat, while the kids gravitate towards the television and my teenager remains stuck to her phone with free Wi-Fi. I am grateful.

An attractive and comfortable kitchen is a gift. Frasers have understood how to create

a functional and well-designed kitchen that is the heart of the familial sanctuary. This gave me assurance of stability I was used to as a mother, running the kitchen; the head of the heart. The first dish I made was a family favourite, *pulut hitam*, with ingredients bought just across Unity Street at UE Mall. You will soon realise the ease and convenience of staying at Fraser Place.

Roaming the immediate grounds, the porticos and stucco finishes enhance the Mediterranean atmosphere, perfect for Singapore's deliciously warm climate. A skip away on the mezzanine level of the third floor is the welcoming 20-metre pool, flanked by a beautifully designed, fully equipped gym that hosts a sauna and a steam room.

Follow the well-sheltered al-fresco walkway past an enchanting corner to another watery playground of slides and water pistols for the little ones. With its row of little swings, tiny tricycles and a seating area for grown-ups, this is just one of many spots within this safe compound crafted to while the afternoon away building bonds.

ADULT INDULGENCE

Family is everything, I always believe, but some alone time without the kids is always a welcome break! Thank goodness for the myriad facilities at Fraser Place that allow the kids to enjoy with neighbours and friends. This, of course, leaves Mom to take a luxurious shower with Frasers' spa-like rum bath, peppermint shampoo and cilantro hair conditioner by MALIN+GOETZ. Followed by calming tea sipped on the very spacious balcony as the sun sets, it's like being taken away on a balmy Mediterranean escape.

Beyond, the piazza-like courtyard is the perfect place to indulge in after-work drinks, a habit gladly acknowledged by spouses, before a trip up to the gym or a swim before dinner. Of course, it's another story if a football match is on, when the courtyard becomes an all-night club of sorts as the pubs put up massive screens for their patrons. It is no surprise more than half are residents of Fraser Place.

PRECIOUS GATHERINGS

While you can always look forward to breakfast, starting the day as a family surrounded by the glorious morning bustle of The Hub, dinner on the other hand can be exasperating.

Sometimes, an hour goes by in an attempt to round up family members scattered around this splendidly delightful and expansive complex! With the hubby in the gym, my teenager burrowed into one of the many cosy corners around the multifaceted abode with friends, and the little one having endless fun in one of the pools, it takes a bit of a workout before dinner can be served.

Yet, once the always-noisy chatter of dinnertime starts, you realise that such simple moments are what makes life complete. It doesn't hurt to be surrounded by chic and contemporary interiors of a fully furnished luxury serviced apartment, and then embraced by the warmth of Fraser Place larger milieu that harness gatherings, bonding and memories.

Pool table



Indoor children's playground

Three-bedroom kitchenette



PROMOTION FOR READERS!

Enjoy an **ADDITIONAL 5%** off our existing Super Deal Promotion, exclusively for Fraser Suites Singapore and Fraser Place Robertson Walk, Singapore, when you book now!

Promotion Code: **AGE05**
Promotion Ends: October 31, 2015

**FRASER SUITES
SINGAPORE**



**FRASER PLACE
ROBERTSON WALK**



www.frasershospitality.com

♦ ♦ ♦

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Editors Note

“ *Not all those who wander are lost.* ”

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Outside of colonisation, intrinsic worlds of diverse heritage and cultures have evolved inexorably; culminating in some of the world's most fascinating of mythos, expressed at times in the subtlest of nuances, and wistfully missed because they lack the flair and commercial ego.

Yet, if you are fortunate enough to stumble upon such clandestine finds, they add flavour like you've never relished, presenting a side of cultures so few have truly experienced.

In this swansong special edition under my charge, I present to you faces and places of Asia you may never chance upon, chronicled only by those who hold bona fide birthrights to tell tales of lands they have inherited and invested in.

With memories that reverberate along three or more generations, what can be mistaken for the mundane, through local eyes, are results of ancestral efforts; results that give each country the distinction Asia is famous for.

I hope this edition gives you opportunities like you've never had and inspire a journey unlike anything you've ever known. I thank you for this sojourn and hope what you've received over the years within the pages of ASIAN Geographic will last a lifetime.

Shalom, salam, om shanti,



ASIAN Geographic's editor received the prestigious
Editor of the Year award at the 2011, 2012 & 2014 MPAS Awards.

CHAIRMAN
LIM Geok Khoon

ASIAN
Geographic
passport

EDITORIAL

PUBLISHER/EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

John THET • thet@asiangeo.com

SENIOR EDITOR

Lunita S V MENDOZA • lunita@asiangeo.com

PHOTOGRAPHER

Justin ONG • justin@asiangeo.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Ian SELDRUP • ian@asiangeo.com

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

ADVERTISING & MARKETING MANAGER

Cassandra Ann DRAGON •

cassandra@asiangeo.com

MARKETING MANAGER (EVENTS/MAGAZINES)

Felicia LIU • felicia@asiangeo.com

Karter LEE • karter@asiangeo.com

MARKETING EXECUTIVE (EVENTS/MAGAZINES)

Wing Tong LO • wingtong@asiangeo.com

OPERATIONS & ADMIN EXECUTIVE

Kaero TEO • kaero@asiangeo.com

DESIGN

SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Justin ONG • justin@asiangeo.com

CIRCULATION

TRAFFIC/PRODUCTION SENIOR MANAGER

Victor OW • victor@asiangeo.com

MARKETING/CIRCULATION REGIONAL MANAGER

Lauren HARRIS • lauren@asiangeo.com

MARKETING/CIRCULATION MANAGER

P. PANIR • panir@media-group.com.sg

Editorial Submissions • editor@asiangeo.com

Subscriptions • subscribe@media-group.com.sg

Advertising • ads@asiangeo.com

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MARINA
MANDARIN
SINGAPORE
BY MERITUS



South Asia

PASSPORT TO BANGLADESH

LANGUAGE:

Bangla

TRAVEL TIPS:

If you wish to hike in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, remember to obtain a permit from local authorities beforehand.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Dhaka

Airlines:

Biman Bangladesh Airlines, UBD Airlines, Tigerair

CURRENCY:

Bangladeshi Taka (US\$1 = 77.4 BDT)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Dress conservatively. In general, cover your shoulders and knees.
- Ask for permission before taking photos of people, especially in the rural areas.

- Avoid using your left hand to eat or to pass objects, as it is considered unclean.

HOTELS:

Dhaka Regency Hotel & Resort

www.dhakaregency.com

Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka

www.panpacific.com/en/hotels-resorts/bangladesh/dhaka.html

Hotel Pacific

www.hotelpacificdhaka.net

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- The Sundarbans
- Paharpur Buddhist Vihara
- Kantajew Temple

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

November–March

FESTIVALS:

- Pahela Baishakh (Bengali New Year), April 14
- Language Martyrs' Day, February 21
- Eid-ul-Fitr (End of Ramadan), July 17

MALDIVES



Corbis



PASSPORT TO BHUTAN

LANGUAGE:

Dzongkha

TRAVEL TIPS:

Point of sale services are available nationwide and visitors can pay by credit card at most hotels and handicrafts stores.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Paro International Airport, Paro

Airlines:

Bhutan Airlines, Druk Air

CURRENCY:

Bhutanese Ngultrum (US\$1 = 62.2 BTN)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Be cautious about buying anything old or antique, as customs will only allow the export of goods certified as non-antique.
- Take note that smoking is not allowed in most areas and the sale of tobacco products is prohibited.
- It is disrespectful to wear shorts in public buildings and monasteries. However, wearing shorts for hiking in the country and walking in towns is perfectly acceptable.

HOTELS:

Uma Paro

www.comohotels.com/umaparo

Hotel Druk

www.drukhotels.com/hoteldruk

Hotel Norbuling

www.hotelnorbuling.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Haa Valley
- Dochu La pass
- Taktsang Lhakhang monastery

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

April–May and mid–September–November

FESTIVALS:

- Punakha Tshechu (in honour of Guru Rimpoche), February 28–March 2
- Ura Yackchoe (dance festival), April 30–May 4
- Haa Summer Festival, July 4

PASSPORT TO MALDIVES

LANGUAGE:

Dhivehi

TRAVEL TIPS:

Remember that the Maldives is made up of several islands, so the facilities offered by the resort you choose are dependent on what is available on each island.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Ibrahim Nasir International Airport, Malé

Airlines:

Maldivian, Mega Maldives Airlines, Singapore Airlines

CURRENCY:

Maldivian Rufiyaa (US\$1 = 15.4 MVR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- While smoking is common in Maldives, smoking and eating during Ramadan is discouraged.
- Ensure there is no disturbance caused to the indigenous population not involved in the tourist trade, who live in isolated island communities.
- Take note that the export of turtle shell or any turtle-shell products is forbidden.

HOTELS:

Gili Lankanfushi Maldives

www.gili-lankanfushi.com

Reethi Beach Resort

www.reethibeach.com

Fihalhohi Island Resort

www.fihalhohi.com.mv

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Hukuru Miskiiy (Old Friday Mosque)
- Utheemu Ganduvaru
- Dive excursions to see manta rays, whale sharks and many other marine species

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

December–April

FESTIVALS:

- Hajj Day, September 24
- Victory Day, November 3
- National Day, December 13



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PASSPORT TO PAKISTAN ▼

LANGUAGE:

Urdu

TRAVEL TIPS:

Many locals expect a small amount of payment in return for being photographed, so ensure you get permission beforehand.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Jinnah International Airport, Karachi

Airlines:

Etihad Airways, Emirates, British Airways

CURRENCY:

Pakistani Rupee (US\$1 = 101.4 PKR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- When relevant, use appropriate academic terms when greeting others, such as "doctor" or "engineer".
- After shaking hands, follow the custom of placing the right hand over the heart.

- Keep your palm faced downwards and gesture inwards when beckoning someone.

HOTELS:

Islamabad Serena

www.serenahotels.com/serenaislamabad/default-en.html

Hotel Crown Plaza Lahore

www.crownplazalahore.com

Regale Inn

www.regale.com.pk

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Mohenjo-daro
- Wazir Khan Mosque
- Lake Saiful Muluk

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

May–October

FESTIVALS:

- Pakistan Day, March 23
- Ashura, October 23
- Birthday of Muhammad Iqbal, November 9



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PASSPORT TO NEPAL

LANGUAGE:
Nepali

TRAVEL TIPS:

Credit cards are accepted at major hotels, shops, and restaurants, but cash may be preferred at smaller shops or stalls.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu

Airlines:

Nepal Airlines, Jet Airways, SilkAir

CURRENCY:

Nepalese Rupee (US\$1 = 99.5 NPR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- If you are trekking, carry all your trash back to your campsite, lodge or hotel for proper disposal.
- Note that it is illegal to export anything older than 100 years from the country.
- You can bargain for souvenirs and trekking services, but respect the prices posted in restaurants and lodges.

HOTELS:

Hotel Shanker

www.shankerhotel.com.np

Hotel Yak and Yeti

www.yakandyeti.com

Hotel Blue Horizon

www.hotelbluehorizon.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Bhaktapur Valley Town
- Janaki Mandir
- Phewa Tal Lake

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

September–December

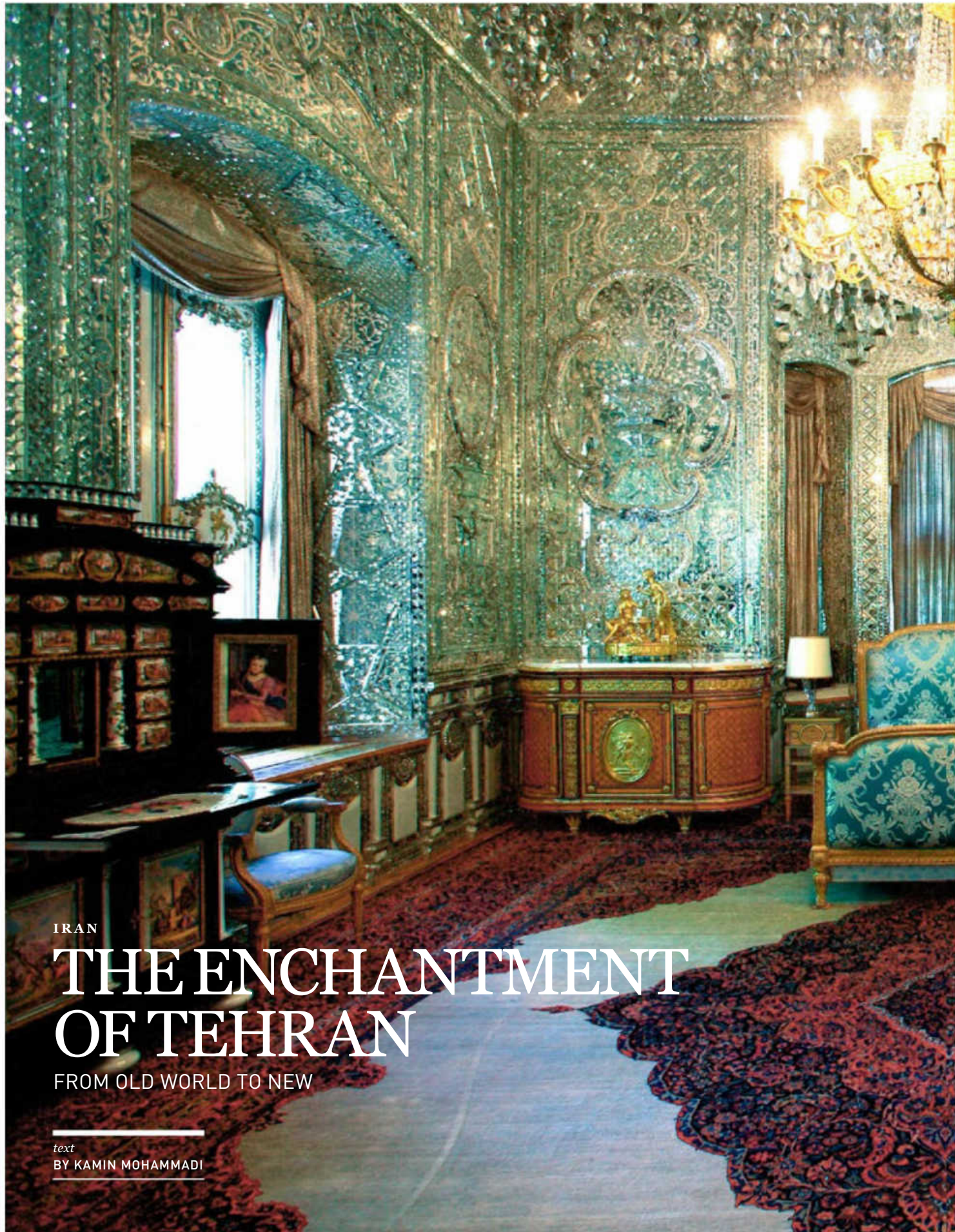
FESTIVALS:

- Holi, March 3
- Buddha Jayanti, May 2
- Dashain, October 18



Corbis





IRAN

THE ENCHANTMENT OF TEHRAN

FROM OLD WORLD TO NEW

text
BY KAMIN MOHAMMADI



IRAN



KAMIN MOHAMMADI: MY TOP 3

RESTAURANTS IN TEHRAN:

Gilak

15 Parc des Princes, Kordestan Highway
+98 21 8804 8291/8803 0404

One of Tehran's best contemporary restaurants is also one of its most discreet. But it is worth the struggle to locate: This small restaurant situated in the Parc des Princes complex is a gem. The restaurant features food from the northern province of Gilan served in a modern interior.

Chadni Restaurant

Armenian Club

68 Khark Street (on the corner with France Avenue)

The Armenian Club not only serves wine, but ladies are also not obliged to wear a headscarf here. The food is excellent: It transports you for one night from the Islamic Republic to the shores of the Black Sea.

Monsoon

Gandhi Shopping Centre, Gandhi Avenue
+98 21 8879 1982

Opened in 1999, this pan-Asian restaurant soon proved to be one of Tehran's best, and not just for the novelty of its cuisine in a town specialising in rice and kebabs.

01 Opulent bedroom in the Green Palace at the Sa'dabad Palace Complex, the summer palace of Shah Reza Pahlavi in Tehran

02 An Iranian schoolgirl in glee

03 National Carpet Museum: Detail from a famous carpet portraying hunting scenes and animals native to Iran

As a child in Tehran, my favourite season was winter, with its heavy snowfalls and clear sunny days. The first day of snow was especially magical: Waking up in the morning to find that the world had turned white overnight, I would rush to listen to the radio announcements to find out which schools were closed due to the snow.

If my school was announced, my sister and I would ring our cousins and say excitedly, "They have closed the world!", urging them to come out to play. A day of snowball fights and building snowmen would ensue, punctuated only by mealtimes in which we would be fed hot *aash*, a broth made of herbs, vegetables, noodles and legumes and sprinkled with hot fried mint and onion rings.

The Iranian capital's location, huddled into the lap of the Alborz mountain range, means that the seasons stay distinct. Residing at the lofty height of 1,191 metres, Tehran boasts winters that are always bright and cold, and snow is an annual event. The city has none of the jewel-like domes of Isfahan, nor the romantic gardens of Shiraz, but with its skyscrapers reaching into the clouds, its frenzy of motorways and the bustle of crowds and cars jostling for supremacy at every street corner, Tehran has enough of a buzz to be a Middle Eastern Manhattan.

Iranians are great walkers and, living as we do on the skirts of the Alborz, Tehranis like nothing more than dawn hikes. Even in the winter, I like to get up with the sun and take the hiking trail up through the



Earl & Nazima Kowal/Corbis

“The Iranian capital's location, huddled into the lap of the Alborz mountain range, means that the seasons stay distinct.”



PASSPORT TO IRAN

LANGUAGE:

Farsi

TRAVEL TIPS:

It is advisable to carry cash when you visit Iran, as apart from major hotels and shops, most other shops do not accept cards.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Imam Khomeini International Airport, Tehran

Airlines:

Lufthansa, Turkish Airlines, Etihad Airways

CURRENCY:

Iranian Rial (US\$1 = 27,615 IRR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Ensure you do not wear any revealing clothing. Women are expected to cover their entire body except the hands, face and feet.
- Leave a little food on your plate to indicate that you are done with your meal.
- Do not take photos of a mosque while people are praying.

HOTELS:

Parsian Azadi Hotel

www.azaditehran.pih.ir

Safir Hotel

www.safirhotel.net

Firouzeh Hotel

www.firouzehhotel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Persepolis
- Imam Square
- Carpet Museum of Iran

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

April–May and September–October

FESTIVALS:

- Martyrdom of Fatima, March 24
- Mehregan (Persian Festival of Autumn), 2015 date not confirmed
- Birthday of Muhammad and Imam Sadeq, December 29

village of Darband, watching the sun slant over the city – before the fog of pollution descends.

Halfway up the hill, before the rash of restaurants that are built overhanging the rushing streams, there is a tiny scruffy place that is perfect for breakfast after a lung-expanding walk trying not to slip on the icy puddles. Next door to a *barbari* bread baker, it serves up all the traditional Iranian breakfast dishes, along with piping hot bread.

When the snow has turned to slush, I head downtown to Aban Street and Tehran's coolest café, Café 78, which is owned by an Iranian female photographer who spent years living in San Francisco and Berlin before resettling back in Iran. Popular with expats and artists, who love the tall windows looking out onto the street, it has a wonderfully eclectic menu that includes *sharbats* (traditional fruit syrup drinks), which patrons enjoy while engaging passionately in discussions on the latest cultural events. Art used to be displayed on the walls, but now a small gallery draws a steady stream of clients down the stairs to see exhibitions of contemporary Iranian art in the basement.

In the years before the Revolution, one of my aunts – studying at Tehran University and who appeared to me the epitome of cool – would sometimes pick me up from school and take me for coffee. She used to take me to Café Naderi (572 Jomhuri Avenue, between Ferdowsi and 30 Tir Street), Tehran's oldest European-style café.

Here, revolutionary thinkers, writers and artists held court, and I saw myself as the last word in sophistication, sitting opposite my

04



Alan Compton/JAI/Corbis



Michael Coyne/Corbis

04 The Aramgah-e Emam Khomeini Mausoleum in Tehran

05 Fashionably dressed women cover themselves in *chadors* at the Imamzadeh Saleh mosque. The mosque is a popular shrine in Tajrish Square, northern Tehran.

05



Bettmann/Corbis

06

intellectual aunt and sipping my café glacé – a mixture of white coffee and vanilla ice cream.

Café Naderi still serves the best café glacé in town and what it has lost in sophistication, it makes up for in pre-Revolutionary ambience – the original menus remain, as do, seemingly, the waiters, who all seem ancient. But even if the waiters haven't changed, the young intellectuals have been replaced by their contemporary counterparts: intense young men with hair skimming their collars as they expound the relative merits of various political ideologies to pretty young women in butterfly-coloured headscarves, in a haze of cigarette smoke.

Last December, it snowed more than it had for 30 years. One night, driving home after a party, I sat in one of the traffic jams that clog the highways even in the early hours. Suddenly, silently, the snow began to fall. In no time, impatient car horns fell quiet and people were leaning out of their car windows to watch the huge tumbling flakes, to feel them on their faces. Before long, the motorway was an impromptu car park, as we all abandoned our cars to run out into the road and pelt one another with fistfuls of snow. In that moment, the alchemy of snow and the Tehrani soul once more transformed the stressed out, fast-paced city into a playground, a symphony of laughter and shrieks, all normal life forgotten for the sake of a snowball fight. **AGP**

KAMIN MOHAMMADI: MY TOP 3

HANGOUTS IN TEHRAN:

Park Ab va Atash (Jahan-e Koodak Junction)
This brand new park, whose name translates as "Park of Water and Fire", opened last year. People come to stroll across the brand new pedestrian bridge (Tabiat Bridge), and see the fountain and its light show.

Tangeh Savashi

A gorge that cuts dramatically through the Alborz mountain range, this stunning mountain pass is a stunning hiking trip a couple of hours outside Tehran. You can hire galoshes to wade through the river itself. Until the early 20th century, it was a royal hunting reserve.

Tandis Mall (Tajrish)

Make like the young, trendy Tehranis and go to the mall! In the leafy north of the city is one of the most fashionable, Tandis Mall, which features designer shops (Zara selling Islamic coveralls), cafés, and sophisticated restaurants. People-watching is the best here!

06 The famous Peacock throne in Golestan Palace, which is reserved for the Shah of Iran during coronation ceremonies

“The alchemy of snow and the Tehrani soul once more transformed the stressed out, fast-paced city into a playground.”

KAMIN MOHAMMADI



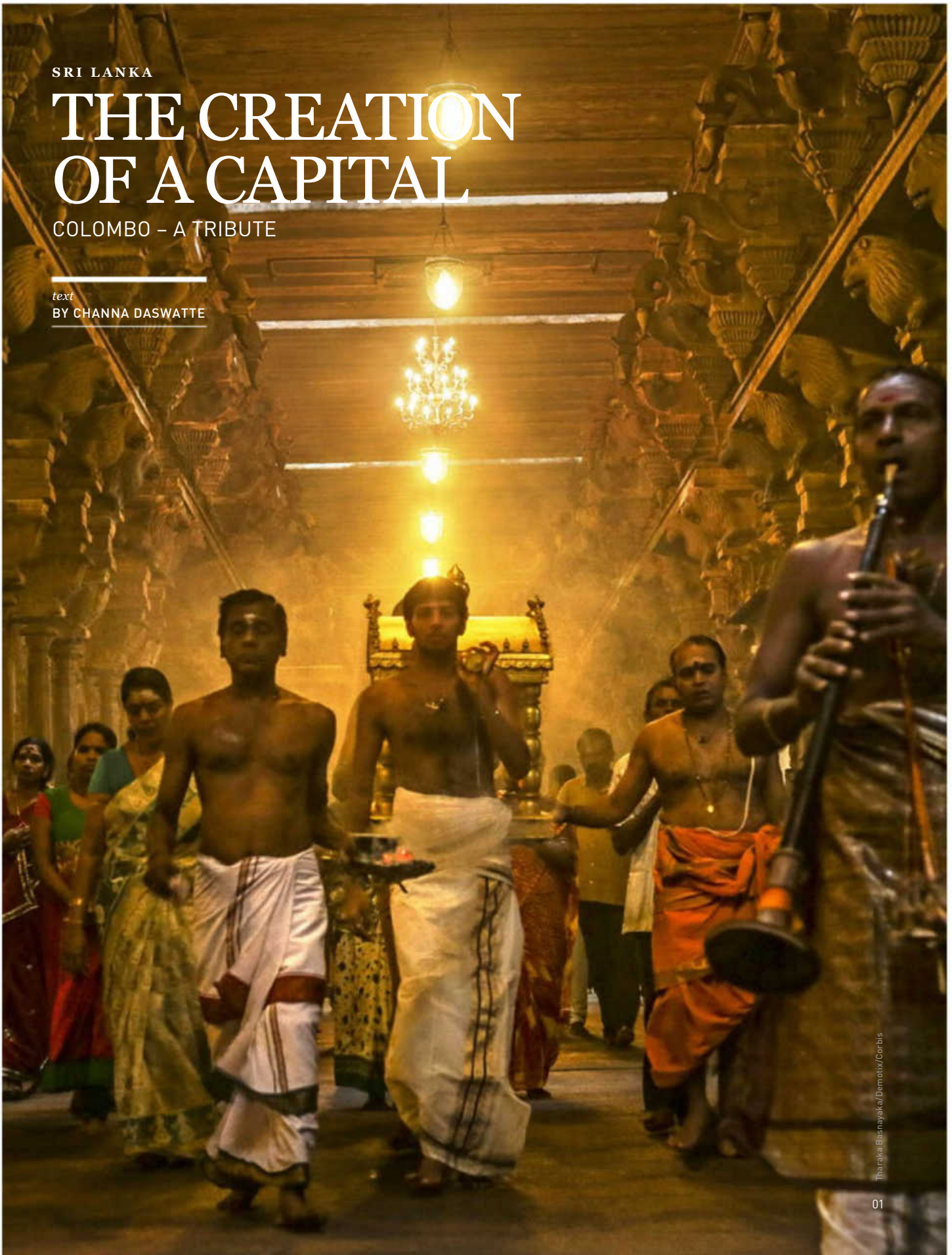
Kamin Mohammadi is an author, journalist and broadcaster who was born in Iran but moved to the UK. She is the author of *The Cypress Tree*, a memoir of growing up in her home country. She has been nominated for an Amnesty Human Rights award in the UK and for a National Magazine Award by ASME in the US.

SRI LANKA

THE CREATION OF A CAPITAL

COLOMBO – A TRIBUTE

text
BY CHANNA DASWATTE



“Colombo is a city of history. Even in the all-engulfing, bustling trading centre that is Pettah, unique architectural features such as colonnaded verandas can be found, though they are fast disappearing.”

01 Receiving blessings: A procession of priests and devotees walk around a Kovil on Diwali Day in Colombo, Sri Lanka

02 One of Colombo's most photographed sights: This small but captivating Seema Malakaya Meditation Centre was designed by Geoffrey Bawa in 1985 and is run by the Gangaramaya Temple. Everything is toned down to provide a tranquil location in which to sit and meditate.

Although I was born in this coastal city, as a child growing up in the interior, Colombo was a place we came to for family weddings or for the annual treat of selecting Christmas presents at the old department stores – when they were still such. In the last 30 years though, since I took up more or less permanent residence in Colombo, the city has grown up, and sometimes I like to think, with me. The commercial capital of Sri Lanka, and by far the biggest city, Colombo is in fact many small towns (including the official legislative capital, Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte), now coalesced into a large urban conglomeration of some 4.5 million inhabitants.

Colombo is a city of history. Even in the all-engulfing, bustling trading centre that is Pettah, unique architectural features such as colonnaded verandas can be found, though they are fast disappearing. One house survived by being a seminary for the longest time, and it is now the magnificent Dutch Museum, with its stately columns clearly distinguishable from the medley of frantic construction around it.

The cosmopolitan nature of this trading centre as befits an age-old port is clearly visible in Pettah. While ethnic differences on the street have somehow been erased by modern clothing habits, they continue to be marked by the buildings and places of worship sitting cheek by jowl with one another. An architectural gem is the Red Masjid with its red-and-white brick construction from the 19th century. A stone's throw



Paul Panayiotou/Corbis



03



FAVOURITE RESTAURANT:

THE MINISTRY OF CRAB

Old Dutch Hospital Bank of Ceylon Mawatha
Bedwin Restaurant
Sri Lanka
+94 11 2 342722

from the mosque are the Kathiresan Temple on Sea Street, overrun with jewellers' stores (the main business of the descendants of the Hindu Chetty merchants), and Ramanathan Temple, built in solid granite in the early 20th century in the style of the great Rameswaram Temple in South India. Nearby is the classically designed St Anthony's Church, which everyone visits, regardless of faith.

While two other Christian denominations once dominated Sri Lanka, it appears the Portuguese were the most successful, perhaps because with incense and lamps, saints and virgins, Catholicism was closest in its practices to the local religions. St. Lucia's Cathedral sits in splendour on a square reminiscent of Goa or Rome, while St. James' Church, further north on a hill, conveys the intensity of the faith in this part of Colombo, which is now shared with a growing Muslim population. A number of newly built modern mosques can be seen in this heavily built-up and populated part of the city. One of the few remnants of the old elegant suburb is seen in the Whist Bungalow, now conserved and used as a community party hall, which overlooks a grand sweeping view over the river mouth.

The eastern edge of Colombo was always defined by Baseline Road, so named, the story goes, because it was used as the baseline for the survey of Ceylon. The cemetery and the golf course just beyond were as far as most residents of Colombo ever got. Beyond this was, for all intents and purposes, wilderness.

Even today, many think of it that way, even after the National Parliament and official administrative capital were moved to a new city here, built on reclaimed land. This new city, Sri Jayawardenapura Kotte,



04

“The essence of Colombo for me is the harmony of these two principal areas of the greater city: the energy of the old city of Colombo and the peace and serenity of the ancient but new city of Sri Jayawardenepura.”

03 Devatagaha Mosque: One of the more prominent mosques in Colombo, its exterior is almost an iconic part of the architecture near Town Hall. It is also partly a shrine to a Saint from the 19th century - Shaikh Usman Waliyullah - and Muslims and non-Muslims alike visit to pay their respects

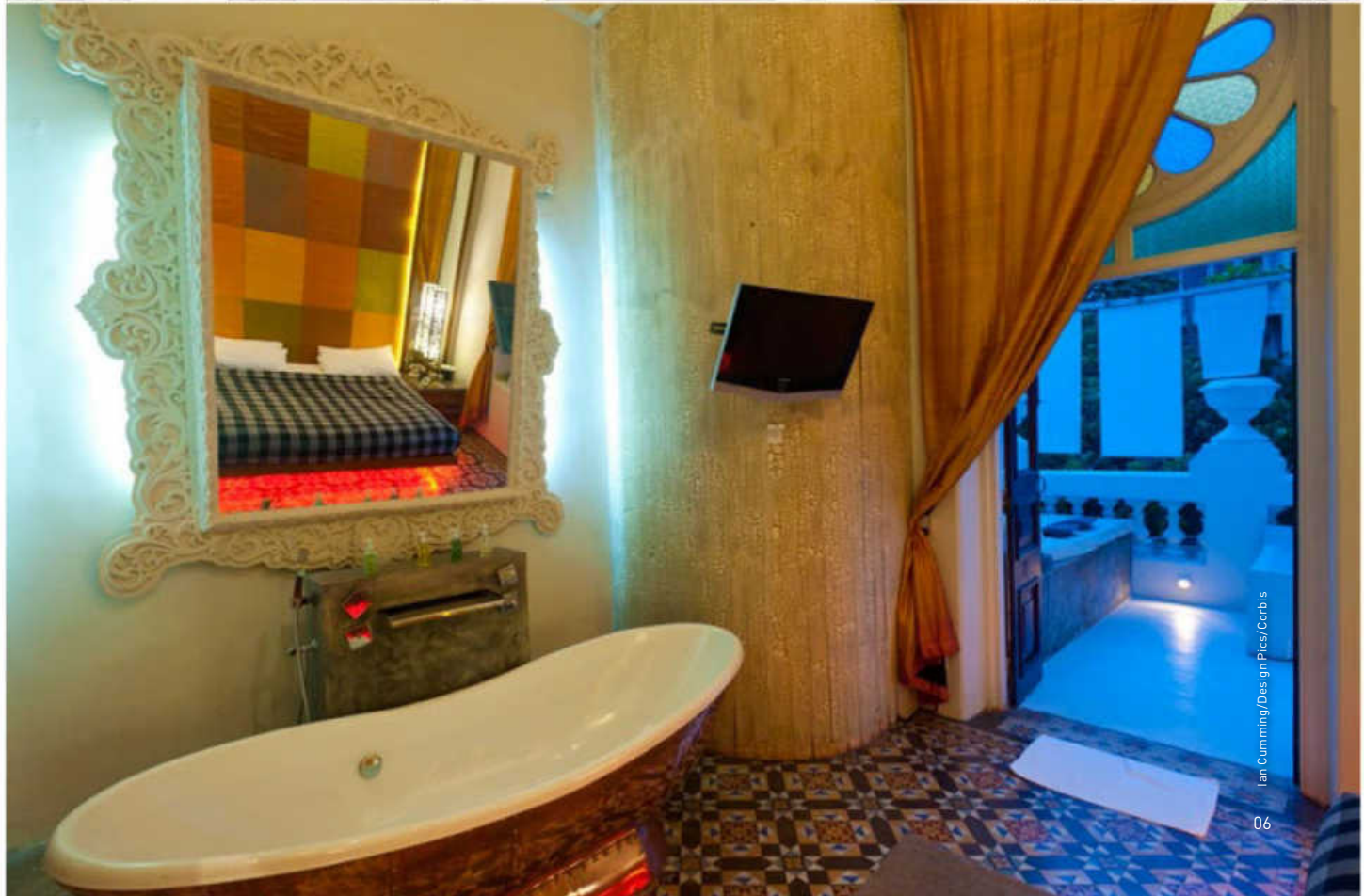
04 The historical Cargills and Millers building, currently used as headquarters of Cargills [Ceylon] PLC: In 1844, William Miller and David Sime Cargill commenced a general warehouse, import and wholesale business in Colombo Fort. The establishment was named the 'House of Cargills'.

is centred on a lake formed by dredging the marshlands that protected the site of the 14th-century city of the same name. The ancient city was described in poetry as “a city that by its teeming opulence drives the Devas’ (demigods) city into insignificance”.

Today’s low-rise suburb, however, is quite unlike that description. The unplanned road network arising out of arbitrary land subdivision has resulted in a very tight residential fabric. Its informality, though a nightmare to navigate and requiring the aid of a mobile phone, has its own easygoing charm. Remnants of the rampart that once ringed the bottom of the hill remain, and at the Weherakanda Ruins, two stupa-like structures mark the location of either the cremation site of the first king of the city or a Buddhist monastery. One of the older houses in the area, next to the Kotte Archeological Museum, dates in part from the mid-18th century.

The new roads, built on the edges of the marshes and connecting with the open watery vistas, make this part of Colombo a very scenic and liveable area. Starting with the Diyatha Uyana complex, once a golf course but now a public park and seaplane landing strip, all the marsh areas are now being transformed into a giant park and water garden with indigenous planting that is intended to be the serene core of the city.

The essence of Colombo for me is the harmony of these two principal areas of the greater city: the energy of the old city of Colombo and the peace and serenity of the ancient but new city of Sri Jayawardenepura. The contrast is palpable as one approaches via its main access from Colombo, when suddenly, the vistas open up to endless views over water and greenery. Notwithstanding the congested small trading centres and



05 In 1789, there were 289 acres of cinnamon trees in the gardens. Today, Cinnamon Gardens is the location of the Prime Minister's Office, Independence Hall, Colombo Town Hall and National Museum (pictured), as well as numerous foreign embassies and high commissions, located down streets lined with fine trees and mansions that are home to the country's elite

06 Bathroom and verandah of the Presidential Suite in Casa Colombo Hotel

07 As old as the ocean: Sri Lanka has the longest continuous history of Buddhism of any Buddhist nation, with the Sangha having existed in a largely unbroken lineage since its introduction in the 3rd century

PASSPORT TO SRI LANKA

LANGUAGES:

Sinhala, Tamil

TRAVEL TIPS:

The Tamil-majority north is no longer off limits to travellers, but hotels and tourist facilities remain basic.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Bandaranaike International Airport, Katunayake

Airlines:

SriLankan Airlines, Mihin Lanka, Singapore Airlines, Emirates

CURRENCY:

Sri Lankan Rupee (US\$1 = 133 LKR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Avoid taking photographs of any soldiers you may see.
- Visit a spice and tea market and try your hand at some cricket – both will warm you up to the locals.
- Never enter into bargaining if you have no intention to purchase the product.

HOTELS:

Casa Colombo
www.casacolombo.com
Queens Hotel
www.queenshotel.lk
Hotel Shiromi
www.hotelshiromi.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Temple of the Tooth
- Sigiriya Fortress
- Nurweya Eliya city

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

December–March

FESTIVALS:

- Tamil Thai Pongal Day, January 15
- Sinhala & Tamil New Year Day, April 13
- Binara Full Moon Poya Day, September 27



Yadid Levy/Robert Harding World Imagery/Corbis

07

ill-designed urban residential areas confined mostly to the low hills surrounding the low-lying lakes and marshes, this reprieve makes the energy of Colombo even more satisfying.

In a twist of fate, Sri Jayawardenepura, which began its growth at the expense of Colombo 600 years ago, now begins to draw strength from the other's existence, both literally as a residential area for its citizenry and metaphorically as an alter ego of itself.

Landing at the waterdrome at Waters Edge Park one afternoon, after a 20-minute flight from Kandy, the last pre-colonial kingdom, I walked across what was once the first hole of the golf course to the Long Bar at Waters Edge for a drink, before hailing a tuk-tuk for the short ride to my house across the lake, and felt lucky to have had this easygoing place chosen for me as my city. **AGP**

CHANNA DASWATTE



Channa Daswatte studied architecture at University College London and the University of London before returning to Sri Lanka and working closely with Geoffrey Bawa, the country's pioneer of tropical modernism. Daswatte's practice, MICD Associates, is located in Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte. He is also an accomplished pianist, writer and artist.



01

INDIA

BEWITCHING BARDHAMAN

MEANDERING THROUGH A HERITAGE DISTRICT

text
BY SONALI ROY

INDIA





02

“A stroll through the city will soon make you realise you are in the cradle of Nature and culture. The façades are inexplicably haunting...”

01 108 Siva Temple: Built by Maharaja Teja Chandra Bahadur in 1809 AD. These Atchala brick temples are made out of auspicious numerical combination in two concentric circles and dedicated to Siva. The Outer Circle Contains 74 temples and inner circle has 34 temples. The Temples represent beads in a Rosary symbolically

02 A collection of 108 temple of Hindu god “Shiv” in Burdwan

Bardhaman, one of the districts of West Bengal, India, is truly ancient, with roots dating back to before 5000 BC. It is where history and the environment intertwine to offer a uniquely quaint, refreshing charm.

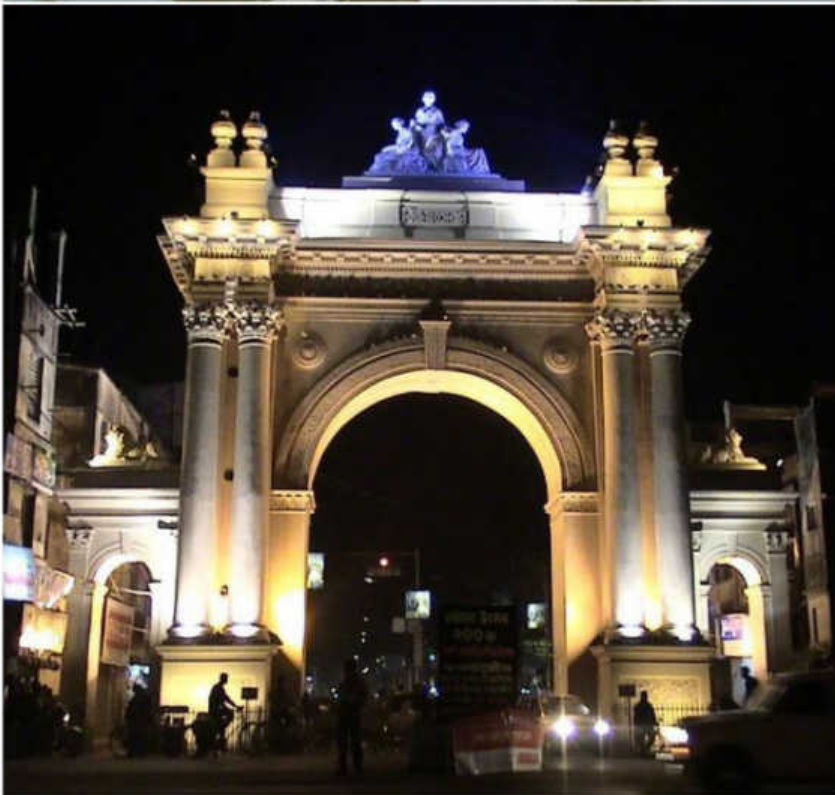
A stroll through the city will soon make you realise you are in the cradle of Nature and culture. The façades are inexplicably haunting – from the *rekha*-type *deula* temples, which are reminiscent of Bengali Hindu architecture, to the weather-beaten Hindu temples evoking religious sentiments belonging to the followers of Shaktism and Vaishnavism. In recent years, they have not only functioned as abodes of worship, but they have also proved to be compelling places of interest for visitors from around the world.

The Ramna Garden in the Golapbag area is a rare sanctuary inviting those with a taste for natural and ecological balance. King Bijay Chand Mahtab established Golap Bag, or the Garden of Roses, in 1884. Marvel at the numerous plant species here – an idyllic haven beautified by mango, casuarina and eucalyptus trees, among many others.

Built in remembrance of the Raj Estate of Bardhaman, this area is home to the Bardhaman Raj, the University of Burdwan, Krishna Sayar Park, the Science Centre, and the Meghnad Saha Planetarium – named after the great Indian astrophysicist. All these places are in the district town, a few steps from the railway station, although the growing influence of modernism has yet to infringe on their harmony and authenticity.

Winter at the vibrant Krishna Sayar Park is a wonderfully pleasurable experience. The place where the king of Bardhaman used to rest, it boasts a remarkable scenic beauty, a crystal-clear lake that offers boating opportunities, as well as a wealth of lush greenery. In the vicinity of the University of Burdwan, you'll find the R.K. Catering Service Centre, where you can enjoy delicious and affordable vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes in an old-fashioned alfresco setting.

03



04

PASSPORT TO INDIA

LANGUAGES:

The majority speaks Hindi; other languages include Bengali, Telugu, Marathi and Tamil

TRAVEL TIPS:

The trains in some stations only stop for a few minutes, so check schedules beforehand and reach the station early in case you have difficulty finding your carriage.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi

Airlines:

Singapore Airlines, Jet Airways, Emirates

CURRENCY:

Indian Rupee (US\$1 = 62.2 INR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Do not touch a common dish with the hand or spoon you use to eat, as it is considered unhygienic.
- Ensure you remove your footwear when visiting a home or a place of worship.
- Do not step over books or papers as they are considered symbols of the Goddess of Learning.

HOTELS:

Dusit Devarana New Delhi

www.devarana.in

Fortel

www.fortelhotels.com

Hotel Cabbana

www.hotelcabbana.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Meghalaya Caves
- The Taj Mahal
- Hampi Village

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

November–March

FESTIVALS:

- Diwali (Festival of Lights), November 11
- Ganesh Chaturthi (birthday of Lord Ganesha), March 6
- Navaratri (Nine Nights in honour of Goddess Durga), October 13–22



SONALI ROY: MY TOP 3

RESTAURANTS IN BARDHAMAN:

Mrigaya Restaurant
Khosbagan, Burdwan, West Bengal
Chadni Restaurant
Grand Trunk Road, Khosbagan, Burdwan,
West Bengal
Bedwin Restaurant
Bardhaman Nursing Home Building,
Ramkrishna Road, Burdwan, West Bengal

HANGOUTS IN BARDHAMAN:

Alcha Café
Ratan Pally, Bolpur, West Bengal
Satya Narayan Cafe and Tea
Grand Trunk Road, Birhata, Burdwan,
West Bengal
Rani Sayar
One of five lakes (*sayars*) in Burdwan,
this large pond was created by the Maharaja
of Burdwan.

05

The university campus is also well worth a visit. Students are blessed with a serene environment for learning, with the lush greenery and birdsong creating a tranquillity that is surely inspiring. The scenic beauty is truly remarkable: the architectural values, the garden of roses, the boat on which the queen once enjoyed her pleasure trips – a soothing symphony for the senses.

No more than 15 minutes by minibus, and you will find yourself at Nawabhat's temple complex, which comprises 108 Shiva temples built in 1789 by the then queen of Burdwan. There is a pond in the middle of the complex on which an idol of Lord Shiva stands. The auspicious Hindu festival of Maha Shivratri and the local *mela* (fair), which runs from mid-July to the first of August during the Bengali month of Sawan, is a particularly good time to visit.

There is another complex of 108 Shiva temples at Kalna, which is about an hour and a half by road from town. A blend of history, Nature, and engineering marvels, the complex houses the spectacular Sarbamangala Devi Temple, along with its famed 2,500-year-old idol, built in 1702 by Kirtichand Roy, the then Maharaja of Burdwan. The temple is located on the banks of the Banka, a tributary of the river Damodar. There is also a guesthouse nearby, and beside it, a beautiful garden accompanies the complex, along with the Tarakeswar, Chandreswar, Rameswar, and Mitraswar Shiva temples.

A further 90 minutes from Bardhaman takes you to the Silampur Road in Panagarh where you'll find a recently renovated dam across the Damodar. The area surrounding the dam has many wonderful picnic spots that can be enjoyed during the winter season. Here, local residents engage themselves in meditation, leaving the hubbub of town life behind. Away from the pollution and crowds, the green reigns supreme, and the beauty of Nature is a tonic for the soul. **AGP**

03 Ramna Park now protects an area of 68.50 acres, of which the lake covers 8.76 acres. Ramna Park now grows 71 species of flowering trees shrubs, perennials and annuals, 36 species fruit bearing plant, 33 species medicinal plant and 41 species of forestry and 11 other species.

04 The famous gate at the centre of Burdwan (West Bengal, India) town: This gate was made by Burdwan Maharaja to welcome Lord Curzon.

05 Natore Rajbari (also known as Pagla Raja's Palace, Natore Palace) was a prominent royal palace, the residence and seat of the Rajshahi Raj family of Zamindars.

SONALI ROY



Sonali Roy was born in the district of Bardhaman in West Bengal, India. After obtaining a Masters of Arts degree in English Literature, she has penned many short stories and poems.

AFGHANISTAN

THE COMPLEXITIES OF KABUL

A CITY ON THE CUSP OF CHANGE

text

BY ZAHRA SADAT

As far back as my memory stretches, Kabul has been home – one wrecked by years of war. It is not a place for the faint of heart, yet for those who remember the golden days, or their innocent children, who have delighted in the treasures of the city amid the horrors and unrest, the capital does have its strange way of tugging at one's heartstrings.

Many areas have left an indelible mark on my soul, despite it being disappointed numerous times by injustice and false promises. In an uncertain environment like this, it is of utmost importance to find a creative outlet to soothe one's aching pride. The Institut



01 The square in front of the Shah-e Du Shamshira mosque in Kabul's old city

02 Afghan children colour their hands with red henna: Especially in the today's Badakhshan region, located in northeastern Afghanistan, the locals apply henna on their feet and hands to protect them from the cold



Hanif/Demotix/Corbis



“I love to stroll past these roads and marvel at these grand residences, which are largely unoccupied. They are evidence of a war-scarred nation, housing owners who have evacuated their abodes due to the civil conflict.”

03 View of Kabul from the Tomb of Sultan Mohammad on the Tapa Maranjan Ridge

04 Kids help in a traditional restaurant at Ka Farushi Bird's Market in Kabul

05 Hope for the future: Students in Kabul enjoy a moment after school

GETTING TO AFGHANISTAN

LANGUAGE:

Pashto, Afghan Dari

TRAVEL TIPS:

Find a reliable car service for travel within Afghanistan and ensure the driver can speak your language well enough.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Hamid Karzai International Airport, Kabul

Airlines:

Ariana Afghan Airlines, Air Arabia, Pakistan International Airlines

CURRENCY:

Afghan Afghani (US\$1 = 57.3 AFN)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Remove your shoes when visiting a home
- During the fasting month of Ramadan, do not publicly consume food or drink or offer either to anyone.
- Do not bring a dog into an Afghan's home.

HOTELS:

The Kabul Serena Hotel
www.serenahotels.com/serenakabul
 Kabul Star Hotel
www.kabulstarhotel.af
 Bastan Guest House
www.bastan-guest-house.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Band-e-Amir lakes
- Panjshir Valley
- Tora Bora cave complex

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

Spring (March–May), Autumn (September–November)

FESTIVALS:

- Nau Roz (New Year), March 22
- Jeshyn-Afghan Day (Independence Day), August 19
- Eid-ul-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice), September 22



03

Peter Langer/Peter Langer - Associated Media/Design Pics/Corbis



04

Oleksandr Ruzhka/NurPhoto/Corbis

Français is one of my favourite places because it consistently holds cultural programmes on a weekly basis. This place prepares one for the opportunity to improve and develop culture. It introduces one to Afghan culture and artwork, and provides an avenue to review and discuss ways to open up communication channels. Locals attend these programmes, which typically concern people of all nationalities and backgrounds.

Baq Babur (Babur Garden), a centre of history, culture and entertainment, is bursting with possibilities. Established as far back as 1528 and famously known as the final resting place of the first Mughal Emperor, Babur, the site now attracts a diversity of people and acts as a platform for creativity through the airing of different views and ideas. The replanted garden and beautiful buildings never fail to serve as a continual source of inspiration for my film projects.

Thoughts and beliefs are the most influential cultural elements. As a filmmaker, I am constantly working with themes that deal with development, reinvention and change. This is why Old Kabul, the only place in the city that has been restored and rebuilt by Turquoise Mountain – a foundation responsible for the regeneration of Afghanistan's traditional arts and historic areas – strikes a particular chord with me. Its architecture proudly shows off elements of Afghan culture and history and bestows us with a renewed sense of national identity. This is rare since, in recent years, new buildings have been constructed according to imported designs and sadly, bear little connection to our heritage.

Another part of Kabul, named Murad Khani, is also known as Old Kabul. In this area of the capital there are large, beautiful houses in an aging Eastern architectural style lining the narrow earthen streets. I love to stroll past these roads and marvel at these grand residences, which are largely unoccupied. They are evidence of a war-scarred nation, housing owners who have evacuated



Ton Koene/Visuals Unlimited/Corbis

05

their abodes due to the civil conflict. It both pains and comforts me that they will never be back again. There is a deep paradox existing between what things were, what is now and what should be. I sometimes feel one could never experience such complex sentiments outside Kabul. Such views are highlighted in my works as well.

For me, Kabul International Restaurant is a must-go for foodies who are after a genuine taste of the city, with Afghan traditional foods such as *ashtek*, *mantoo* and *qabeli* to tantalise the taste buds. When I need a retail fix, I usually head to the City Center – Kabul's most well-known shopping establishment. It boasts malls, coffee shops and sophisticated eateries.

Another street in the neighbourhood of Shahre Naw, called Chicken Street, is where one can find traditional Afghan products, such as leather and wooden embellishments. Some shops on this street even sell clothes made with the skin of *qaraqol*, or *karakul*, a special breed of domestic sheep that originated in Central Asia. This material, a relatively coarse fibre, is used for outer garments and hats. Silk carpets are a mainstay of this area as well.

My heart recalls Qarqa Lake as a home away from home – always a breath of fresh air as a child who marvelled at its scenic beauty. Located just nine kilometres from central Kabul, it is the ideal location for bike rides, jogs and picnics. Sadly, a suicide attack took place here three years ago, tainting its serene reputation, and the reason these gorgeous surroundings have seen fewer visitors since. This is a snapshot of Kabul, where fear and love thrive side by side. **AGP**

ZAHRA SADAT



Zahra Sadat was born in Afghanistan's Bamiyan province and lives in Kabul, working as a freelance journalist for Jadid Media online and in multimedia production. An aspiring filmmaker herself, she founded and directs the Open Society Organization and volunteers with Afghan Youth for Peace.

Southeast Asia

MYANMAR

LAOS

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

VIETNAM

PHILIPPINES

BRUNEI
DARUSSALAM

MALAYSIA

SINGAPORE

INDONESIA

TIMOR-LESTE

PASSPORT TO CAMBODIA

LANGUAGE:

Khmer

TRAVEL TIPS:

Credit card-compatible ATMs are available in major cities such as Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, dispensing US dollars, which is a commonly used currency.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Phnom Penh International Airport

Airlines:

Cambodia Angkor Air, Jetstar, AirAsia

CURRENCY:

Cambodian Riel (US\$1 = 4,066 KHR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Always remove your shoes and any head covering before entering a temple.
- Most temples are run on donations, so do make a small contribution if you visit one.

- Do not point the soles of your feet towards anyone or towards a statue of the Buddha.

HOTELS:

Borei Angkor Resort & Spa

www.boreiankor.com

Hotel Cambodiana

www.hotelcambodiana.com.kh

Hotel Arun Villa

www.arunvilla-phnompenh.com/en

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

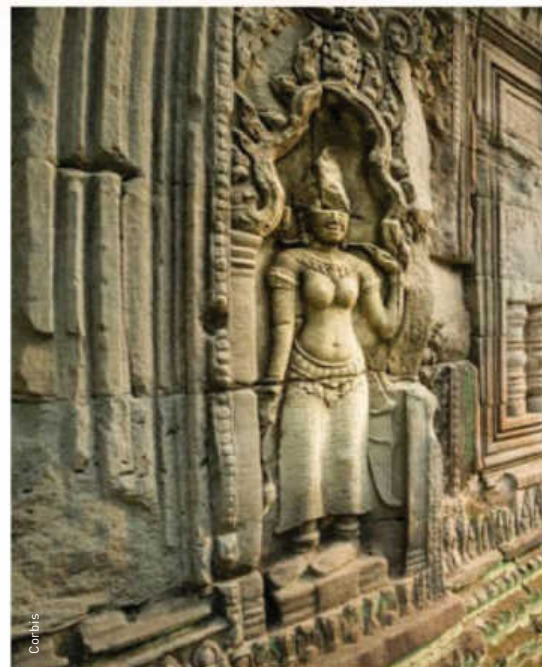
- Royal Palace
- Angkor Wat
- Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

October–March

FESTIVALS:

- Khmer New Year Day, April 14
- Visak Bochea Day (Birth of Buddha), May 3
- Water Festival Ceremony, November 24



Corbis



Corbis

PASSPORT TO BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

LANGUAGE:

Brunei Malay

TRAVEL TIPS:

Tap water must be boiled before it is consumed, but bottled water is very easily available as an alternative.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Brunei International Airport,
Bandar Seri Begawan

Airlines:

Royal Brunei Airlines, AirAsia,
Cathay Pacific

CURRENCY:

Brunei Dollar (US\$1 = 1.36 BND)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Do not point with your finger; instead, use your right thumb with the fingers folded beneath.
- Dress modestly, especially when visiting places of worship or at a social function.

- Do not eat or drink in front of a Muslim during the fasting month of Ramadan.

HOTELS:

The Empire Hotel and Country Club

www.theempirehotel.com

Orchid Garden Hotel Brunei

www.orchidgardenbrunei.com

Jubilee Hotel

www.jubileehotelbrunei.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque
- Malay Technology Museum
- Jerudong Park

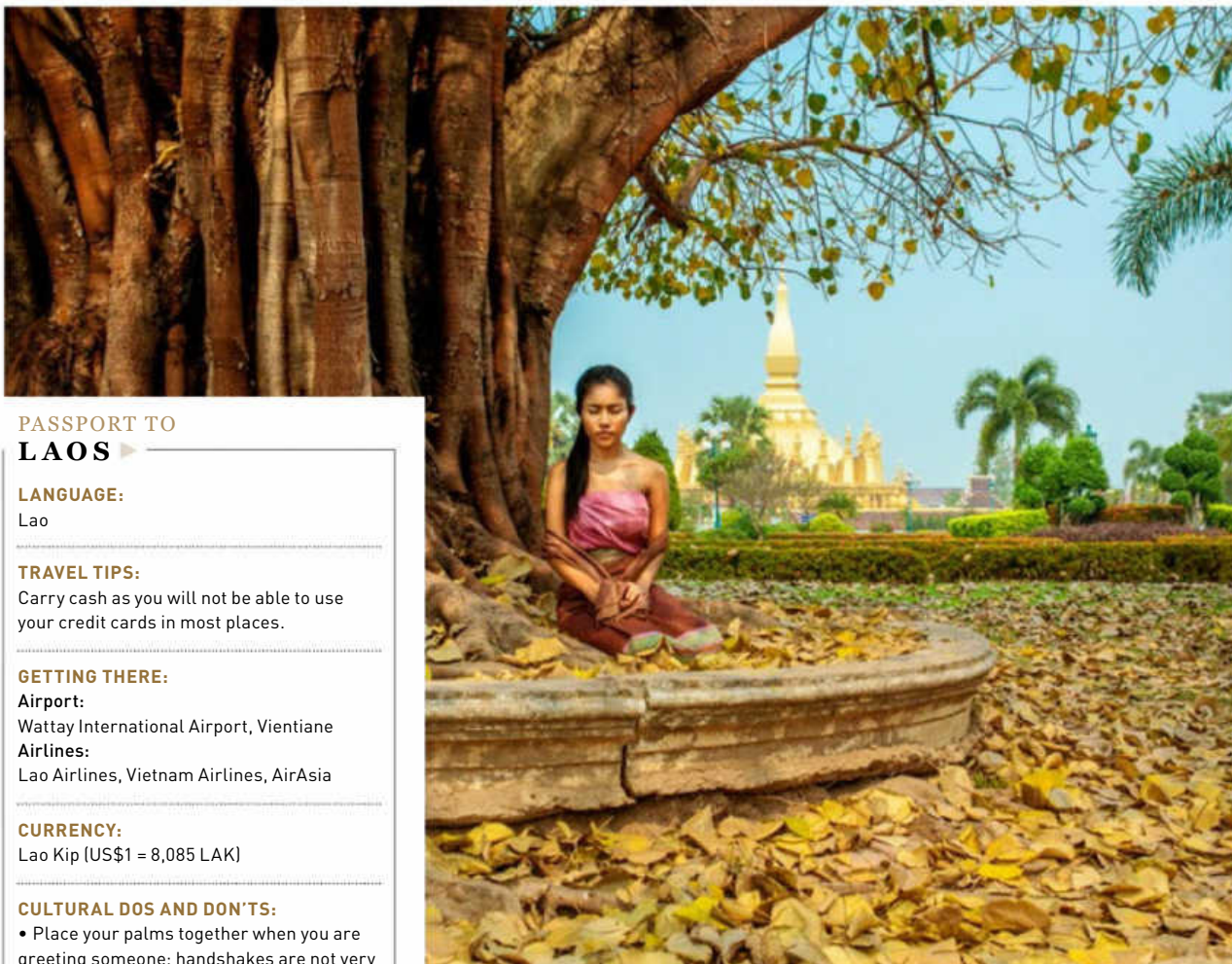
BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

June–September

FESTIVALS:

- Chinese New Year, February 19
- His Majesty The Sultan's Birthday, July 15
- Hari Raya Aidil Fitri, July 17





Corbis

PASSPORT TO LAOS ▶

LANGUAGE:
Lao

TRAVEL TIPS:
Carry cash as you will not be able to use your credit cards in most places.

GETTING THERE:
Airport:
Wattay International Airport, Vientiane
Airlines:
Lao Airlines, Vietnam Airlines, AirAsia

CURRENCY:
Lao Kip (US\$1 = 8,085 LAK)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Place your palms together when you are greeting someone; handshakes are not very common.
- Placing your feet high on tables or furniture, or crossing over someone who is seated, is considered impolite.
- Women should refrain from touching a monk or a monk's robes.

HOTELS:
The Luang Say Residence
www.luangsayresidence.com
Hôtel Khamvongsa
www.hotelkhamvongsa.com
Lao Orchid Hotel
www.lao-orchid.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Buddha Park
- Royal Palace
- Pha That Luang

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:
November–February

FESTIVALS:

- Wat Phou Festival, February 3
- Boun Pi Mai (Lao New Year), April 14–16
- That Inhang Festival, December

PASSPORT TO MALAYSIA ▶

LANGUAGE:
Bahasa Melayu

TRAVEL TIPS:
Taxis may not use meters, so ensure you agree on a price before you embark on the ride.

GETTING THERE:
Airport:
Kuala Lumpur International Airport
Airlines:
Jetstar, Malaysia Airlines, Lufthansa

CURRENCY:
Malaysian Ringgit (US\$1 = 3.63 MYR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Call beforehand if you intend to visit someone's home.
- Do not call for a toast, as the country's largely Muslim population does not drink.

- Ask for permission before taking photos of places of worship.

HOTELS:
Four Seasons Resort Langkawi
www.fourseasons.com/langkawi
V Hotel
www.vhotel.com.my
GRID 9 Hotel
www.grid9hotels.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Kinabalu Park
- Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia
- Batu Caves

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:
May–September

FESTIVALS:

- East Wind Festival, March 1
- Pesta Kaul Mukah, month of March
- Kuala Lumpur Lake Garden Festival, August 17

PASSPORT TO MYANMAR

LANGUAGE:

Burmese

TRAVEL TIPS:

Credit cards and traveller's cheques are not officially in use in the country, though some hotels may accept them.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Yangon International Airport

Airlines:

Myanmar Airways International, Golden Myanmar Airlines, Jetstar

CURRENCY:

Burmese Kyat (US\$1 = 1,029 MMK)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

Use both hands when offering or receiving objects. Do not sit with your back facing a Buddha statue or image. Do not touch anyone on their head.

HOTELS:

The Strand Hotel

www.hotelthestrand.com

Mandalay City Hotel

www.mandalaycityhotel.com

Alfa Hotel

www.alfahotelyangon.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Shwedagon Pagoda
- Mandalay Palace
- Pindaya Caves

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

November–February

FESTIVALS:

- Full Moon Day of Tabaung, March 27
- Thingyan Water Festival, April 13
- Taung Pyone Festival, August 17



Corbis



Corbis



PASSPORT TO SINGAPORE ▲

LANGUAGES:

English, Malay, Mandarin, Tamil

TRAVEL TIPS:

Tourists purchasing more than S\$100 worth of selected goods at participating shops may claim a refund on the seven percent tax paid, at Changi Airport.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Singapore Changi Airport

Airlines:

Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Air France

CURRENCY:

Singapore Dollar (US\$1 = 1.36 SGD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Bargain while shopping at smaller shops with no fixed price, such as at Sim Lim Tower.
- Do not vandalise or litter – these are serious offences that are punishable with heavy fines.

- Tipping is not part of the local culture and most restaurants include a service charge in the bill.

HOTELS:

Marina Bay Sands

www.marinabaysands.com

Robertson Quay Hotel

www.robertson-quay-hotel.cornerhotel.info

Tai Hoe Hotel

www.taihoehotel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Trick Eye Museum
- Marine Life Park
- Gardens by the Bay

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

Year-round

FESTIVALS:

- Chinese New Year, February 19
- Hari Raya Puasa, July 17
- Deepavali, November 10

PASSPORT TO THAILAND ▼

LANGUAGE:

Thai

TRAVEL TIPS:

Thai banks charge a fee per withdrawal when you use their ATMs with a foreign card.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Suvarnabhumi Airport

Airlines:

Thai Airways, Singapore Airlines, Bangkok Airways

CURRENCY:

Thai baht (US\$1 = 32.6 THB)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- In Thailand, it is unacceptable to speak ill of the royal family.
- Visitors must dress neatly and modestly at all religious shrines.
- Do not purchase souvenirs made from wild animals, including snake or monitor lizard skin, turtle shells, or ivory.

HOTELS:

Amanpuri

www.amanresorts.com/amanpuri/home.aspx

True Siam Hotel

www.truesiamhotel.com

Loy La Long

www.loylalong.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

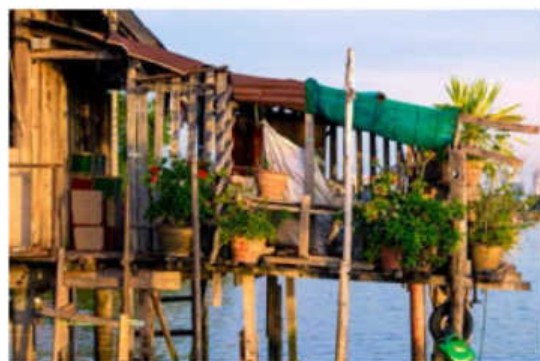
- Grand Palace
- Ayutthaya
- Siriraj Medical Museum

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

November–February

FESTIVALS:

- Songkran Festival (Thai New Year), April 13
- Coronation Day, May 5
- Chulalongkorn Day, October 23



PASSPORT TO TIMOR-LESTE

LANGUAGE:

Tetum

TRAVEL TIPS:

Restaurant bills do not have a service charge added to them, yet tipping is not mandatory. Visitors may tip 10 percent of the bill if they wish to do so.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Presidente Nicolau Lobato International Airport

Airlines:

Air Timor, SilkAir, Airnorth

CURRENCY:

United States Dollar

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Only drink bottled water and avoid ice.
- Avoid contact with animals, as they are generally not vaccinated and can transmit diseases.
- Do not purchase or export corals, birds and turtle shells as these acts are punished by law.

HOTELS:

The Discovery Inn

www.discoveryinntimorleste.com

Dili Beach Hotel

www.truesiamhotel.com

East Timor Backpackers

www.easttimorbackpackers.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Atauro Island
- Tatamailau Mountain
- Areia Branca beach and hinterland

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

May–July

FESTIVALS:

- Easter Sunday, April 5
- Independence Day, May 20
- Feast of the Sacrifice, September 23



PASSPORT TO VIETNAM

LANGUAGE:

Vietnamese

TRAVEL TIPS:

Credit cards are accepted in larger hotels and restaurants in Hanoi but there may be additional charges for using them, about three percent.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Ho Chi Minh City Airport

Airlines:

Vietnam Airlines, Jetstar, Emirates

CURRENCY:

Vietnamese Dong (US\$1 = 21,360 DNG)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Do not sit until told where to sit; the oldest person in the group sits first.
- Do not carry large amounts of money or wear too much jewellery.

- Dress conservatively, especially when visiting temples or pagodas.

HOTELS:

The Nam Hai

www.ghmhotels.com/en/nam-hai

Blue Diamond Hotel

www.bluediamondhotel.com.vn

Kinh Do Hotel

www.kinhdohotel.vn

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Củ Chi tunnels
- The Imperial City
- Vietnam Museum of Ethnology

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

May–October

FESTIVALS:

- Perfume Pagoda Festival, March 5
- Lang Ca Ong (Whale Festival), month of April
- Mid-Autumn Festival, September 27





01



QUEZON CITY

THRILLA IN MANILA

REALITY CHECK IN QC

text

BY ALYA B. HONASAN

Growing up in a democratic suburb away from the designer labels and big money of Manila's central business districts has its benefits.

01 Thrilla in Manila was the third and final boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier. It was contested in 1975 for the Heavyweight Championship of the World at the Araneta Coliseum in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines, on Wednesday, October 1.

I was born and raised in Quezon City, Philippines, a.k.a. QC, named after our second president Manuel L. Quezon and located north of the sprawling, chaotic metropolis that is Metro Manila. Like many QC-ers, I ended up working elsewhere, at the country's corporate hubs a few kilometres away.

“*In QC, not everybody knows what a designer label is – and that has kept things real, democratic and more nationalistic than in concrete jungles taken over by Western standards and big business.*”

NOTE TO SELF:
A MUST VISIT

**CONCEPCION OF THE OASIS
ACUPUNCTURE CLINIC**

97 Maginhawa Street, Sikatuna Village
Tel: +63 2 921 7649

VAN GOGH IS BIPOLAR

154 Maginhawa, Sikatuna Village
www.vangoghispolar.com

PIPINO

39 Malingap Street, Sikatuna Village
www.pipinoveg.com

Still, if you grew up in densely populated QC, seat of education, home to non-government organisations, and in recent years, a hotbed of independent art and music, you learn to be in less of a hurry.

Its residents cut across all socioeconomic sectors, from the old rich in mansions in New Manila, to the government employees in cramped housing projects, to even the city's large numbers of urban poor in their shanties. In QC, not everybody knows what a designer label is – and that has kept things real, democratic and more nationalistic than in concrete jungles taken over by Western standards and big business. Life seems less about making it than living it.

Two premiere centres of higher learning in the country – the University of the Philippines (UP) (Diliman, www.upd.edu.ph) and Ateneo de Manila University (Katipunan Avenue, www.admu.edu.ph) – are within a sort tricycle ride of each other. I found myself on the campus of Ateneo, a Jesuit university where the call to be a “man for others” somehow gets under your skin. In its classrooms, studying under renowned art critic and poet Emmanuel Torres, I was a psychology major who planned to become a doctor, but got waylaid into a career in journalism, thanks to my teacher's ability to make well-written words sound so beautiful. They took my breath away.

I also discovered Philippine visual arts, which I would cover prodigiously in my early years as a journalist, at the Ateneo Art Gallery (Rizal Library, University Road, Diliman, www.ateneoartgallery.org). Here, modern and social realist pieces prove how limitless art can really be; I still recall a morbid mixed-media piece called *Homage to Dodjie Laurel*, an aluminium helmet mounted with wood and machine parts made by the late National Artist J. Elizalde Navarro in 1969, in memory of a popular race car driver who perished in a crash.

Neighbouring UP is a world unto itself, a cradle of feverish student activism, yet overrun with tranquil fields and big, beautiful trees that

02 The city skyline from Makati Avenue in the Makati Business District



shelter the main thoroughfares; the central Sunken Garden, where students picnic, play soccer and sit on the grass on sunny days, is perfect for a weekend jog or bike ride. The Jorge B. Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Center on campus (Diliman, www.vargasmuseum.wordpress.com) is an excellent repository of Philippine art, including fine pieces by Filipino sculptor Guillermo Tolentino.

I found another artistic home of sorts as an occasional stage actor with one of the most dynamic university-based theatre groups in the country, Dulaang UP (www.facebook.com/DulaangUnibersidadNgPilipinas), from which some of the country's most respected actors have graduated into show business. The underfunded, but fearless, productions at the Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero Theatre have been staged for 39 seasons, covering everything from Shakespeare and Ibsen to original Filipino works in both English and Tagalog – certainly worth the drive through infamous Manila rush-hour traffic for incredibly cheap tickets.

03



Gardel Bertrand/Hemis/Corbis



Danielle Galt/JA/Corbis

04

PASSPORT TO PHILIPPINES

LANGUAGE:

Tagalog

TRAVEL TIPS:

Tipping is expected for many services. The standard amount is 10 percent of the total bill, unless already included.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Manila Ninoy Aquino International Airport

Airlines:

Philippine Airlines, Jetstar,
Singapore Airlines

CURRENCY:

Philippine Peso (US\$1 = 44.3 PHP)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- When shopping in a public market, do bargain to get the best price.
- When travelling between June and October, always carry an umbrella with you when you leave the hotel.
- For formal occasions, the traditional Barong Tagalog, the Philippine national costume for men, is just as accepted as a suit and tie.

HOTELS:

Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila

www.sofitelmanila.com/en

New Horizon Hotel

www.newhorizonhotel-manila.com

Casa Bocobo Hotel

www.casabocobo.com.ph

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park
- Banaue Rice Terraces
- San Agustin Church

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

February–May

FESTIVALS:

- Ati-Atihan Festival, January 19
- Moriones Festival, March 30
- Masskara Festival, October 17

03 The cathedral in Plaza Roma in Intramuros historic district. Kalaripayat mixes combat techniques and

04 Two girls in a rickshaw in traditional wear

05 The Jorge B. Vargas Museum & Filipiniana Research Center, located at the University of the Philippines Diliman campus, houses the collection of art, stamps and coins, library, personal papers and memorabilia of Jorge B. Vargas, which he bequeathed to the university

Pursuits both material and spiritual are easily accessible in QC. Long before the megamalls, the middle-class commercial centre of Cubao, a jeepney ride away from my home, was where we bought everything – including the fresh produce that went into family meals, from the best farmer’s market in the city. I got over the smell of fish and the hazard of slimy, slippery floors quite early, carrying the basket for my mother.

Cubao must be the only place in the world with a mall named after Muhammad Ali – the Ali Mall (Cubao, www.aranetacenter.net), built as a tribute to the boxing champ after he beat Joe Frazier in the 1976 “Thrilla in Manila”. The site of that match, the Araneta Coliseum (Cubao, www.aranetacoliseum.com), named after the family that owned Cubao, stands to this day, a favourite venue for wild collegiate basketball games – a championship bout has to be experienced to be believed in this basketball-crazy nation – and concerts of international stars; Alicia Keys, Lady Gaga and Taylor Swift have all played the “Big Dome”.

If introspection is more your thing, the suburbs across the Ateneo are home to an unusual concentration of retreat houses, including my own haven, the Cenacle (59 Nicanor Reyes, Loyola Heights, www.cenaclephilsing.org), run by Catholic nuns specialising in counselling and spiritual direction. It’s liberal and non-denominational, an unexpected oasis minutes away from busy streets. Thematic weekends on such themes as Jungian psychology or the mid-life journey are offered year-round.

Even the healers in QC work closer to Nature. In Sikatuna Village, near UP, on a street aptly called Maginhawa (which roughly translates to “soothing”), Dr Eddie Concepcion of the Oasis Acupuncture Clinic, the pioneering China-educated acupuncturist in Manila, can relieve you of aching muscles, colds, hormonal imbalances and even a bad mood.

After a session, you’ll have to avoid cold water for a couple of hours, but that doesn’t mean you can’t choose from among the many fantastic restaurants on Maginhawa and its environs. Van Gogh is Bipolar only seats 12 for dinner, so reserve or come early and be ready for a freestyle

05



Sergi Reborado/dpa/Corbis

06

06 Kalesa ride past the facade of Barbara’s Restaurant located at the Plaza San Luis complex in Intramuros, Manila

07 The Big Dome, located in Araneta Center serving as a venue for basketball games, boxing, cockfighting, concerts and variety shows

ALYA B. HONASAN



Alya B. Honasan is a Filipino editor and journalist who has written for various newspapers, magazines and books over the last 26 years. She is a consulting editor and writer for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and WWF’s Coral Triangle Programme. Alya lives in Manila, and is also an Iyengar yoga instructor, a cancer survivor and a loving mom to her dog Kikay.



07

meal by chef Jetro Rafael. Alternatively, walk to the vegetarian restaurant Pipino (that’s Tagalog for “cucumber”) for a crazy good Stuffed Portobello Cheeseburger or a Vegetable *Kare-Kare*, a native stew with a peanut-based sauce normally made with oxtail. The food in Teacher’s Village has gotten so famous, they held the first ever, hugely successful QC Food Fair just recently, right on the streets. Not surprisingly, everyone felt at home. **AGP**

A full-page background image showing a night scene. The sky is filled with stars and the Milky Way. In the foreground, there is a red tent on a grassy hill. In the distance, a town with lights is visible across a valley.

INDONESIA

ESCAPE TO LOMBOK

THE TRADITION OF THE SASAK

text

BY TIO GANERU AND NINA KARINA KARIM





“...wonders that even I haven’t had the chance to explore fully during my 40 years of life here.”

Lombok has many beautiful places that have inspired me since I was a little kid. I live in Mataram, the capital city of West Nusa Tenggara, on the western shore of the island. The beauty of the natural panorama, adorned with lush hills on one side and golden shores on the other, shelters many enticing wonders that even I haven’t had the chance to explore fully during my 40 years of life here.

Starting from the west coast, there is the well-known Senggigi Beach, which has been drawing tourists since the 1980s; the northern territory, with its three main *gilis*, or small islands, namely Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno and Gili Air, along with beaches lining the bays in Sire, Medana and Tebing; the eastern coast, with its beautiful cape, Tanjung Ringgit, and Tangsi Beach, which has become famous for its pink sand, along with more *gilis*, such as Gili Kondo; and finally the southern coast, with its array of stunning, even tinier white-sand *gilis* and unique beaches, the perfect spots for surfers, including Kuta, Mawun, Semeti, Selong Belanak, Aan and Batu Payung.

Rivalling the beaches and islands, the mountainous region of East Lombok has also gained its own popularity. The ever-challenging Mount Rinjani, with its central cone Mount Baru Jari and the fascinating surrounding crater lake Segara Anak, draws thousands of hikers and trekkers every year. The creases and valleys around Mount Rinjani harbour countless natural springs and waterfalls, including Tiu Kelep, Tiu Teja, Sendang Gile, Benang Stokel, Benang Kelambu and Otak Koko.

Each of these places has specific charms. If I were looking for a place to enjoy a quiet day at the beach, where my children can swim in clear, calm waters, I would go to one of the beaches in the Kuta area, like Mawun or Semeti. Although they are further away than the beaches in the Senggigi area, both are found in a secluded bay, so it’s never overcrowded and you won’t be bothered by hawkers.



Victor Fraile/Corbis



Justin Ong

03

Besides the breathtaking view here, you can also climb up on the rocky portion of the beach and take photos of the waves crashing against the rocks in the nearby bay. If I'm feeling a bit adventurous, I will take my family for a trip to the Rinjani valley for a walk to the waterfalls, hike nearby hills like Pergasingan, Anak Dara and Propok, or just enjoy the cool mountain breeze, pick vegetables and strawberries, and camp out or have a picnic. If we want to indulge in the local cuisine while enjoying a swim in a natural spring, we will go to one of the restaurants in Suranadi, specifically at the *beruqaqs*, or wooden stilt huts, over the ponds of carp and tilapia situated amid luscious green rice paddies or fruit orchards.

The Sasak language is the most important aspect of local culture here. When we gather with old friends from school and the neighbourhood, we'll sometimes speak Sasak mixed with Indonesian and Balinese. Mataram has a rather heterogenous population, with the Sasak community coexisting in deep harmony with the Balinese that have lived in Lombok for hundreds of years and have settled into an area we call Kampung Bali. Mataram is also home to Kampung Sasak, the cultural source of Lombok's dominant community.

Foreigners might observe the many similarities between the Sasak and Balinese cultures, but the language used by each culture is distinctively different. I use the Sasak language when I am conversing with friends or people who I'm sure are of Sasak stock, to enhance emotional closeness and inject warmth into the conversation. Some of my friends who belong to the Balinese ethnic group (differentiating the Balinese people who were born and raised in Lombok from the Balinese people in Bali) also use the Sasak language in daily conversation, although they use Balinese when they talk among people of the same

01 Camping at 2,600 metres on Mount Rinjani Ridgeline: An unobstructed view of Lombok's extraordinary heavenly beauty and eerie isolation

02 A surfer rides a wave at reef break at sunset: Hang ten in the waters of Lombok all year round

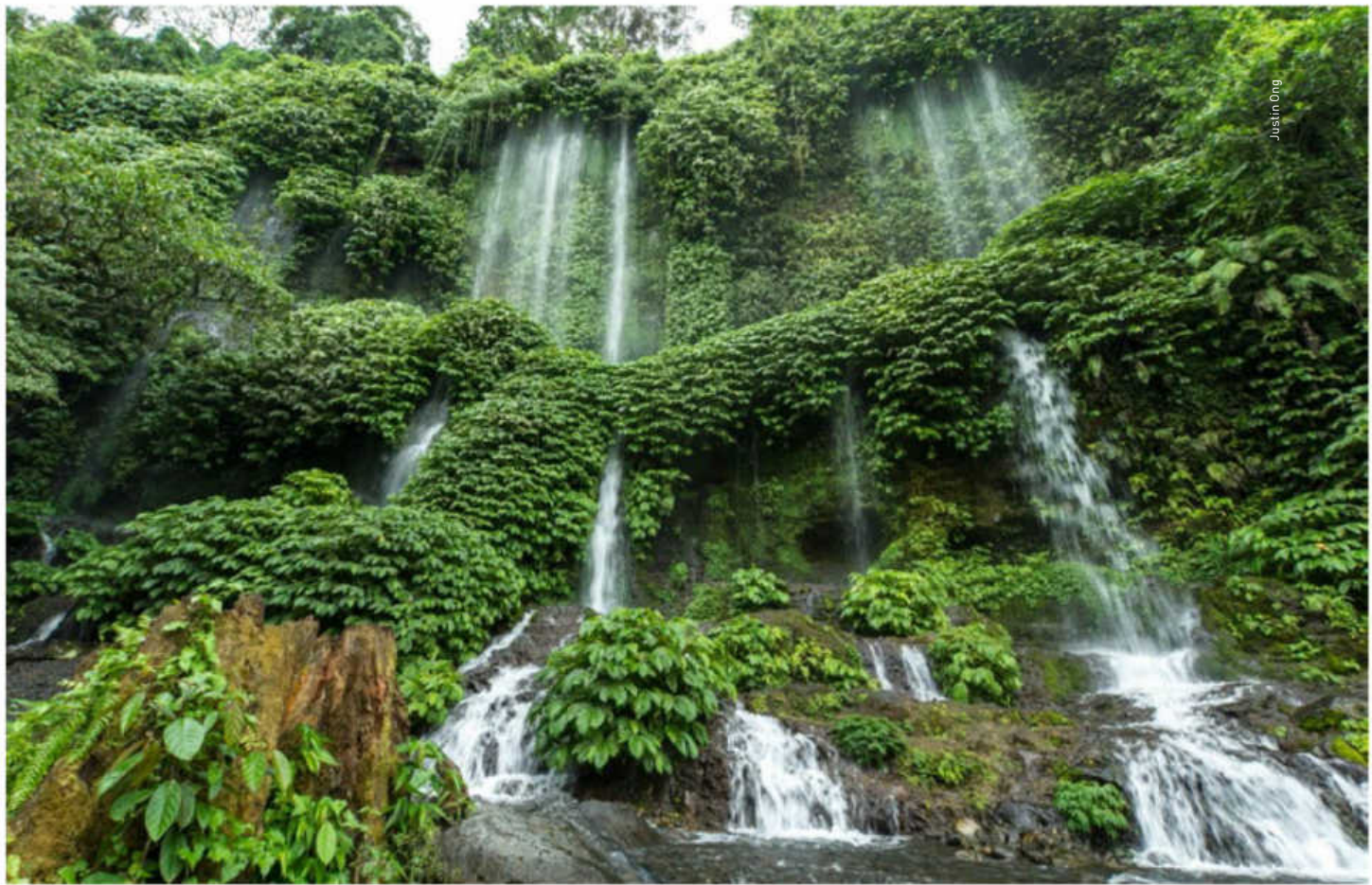
03 Mother Nature orchestrates a cinematic display of Rinjani, the lake and the volcano that resides within her

04 A beautiful young Lombok girl holds a large banana leaf over her head to shield herself from the rain



Owen Franken/Corbis

04



“The Sasak tradition is the most definitive cultural element that influences art and design...”

05 Benang Kelambu Waterfall: From the undergrove, the water is spread out unlike most waterfalls, forming a wall of water akin to a mosquito net

06 A Sasak woman cleans black sticky rice outside her home in Tetebaru: The predominantly Muslim Sasak people are the native inhabitants of Lombok where they form 85% of the population

07 Kuta village: An Indonesian child surfs in the ocean on a piece of styrofoam near the coastline of Lombok island

ethnic group. Some Sasak people are also familiar with the Balinese language and use it to communicate with ethnic Balinese.

Sasak people maintain certain formalities in social interaction. When we talk to someone older, we do not use the same language or display the same manners as we do when we talk to someone of the same age. An older person is addressed in a more polite and formal way. As the majority of Sasak people are Muslims, Islam influences our daily interactions, and when greeting someone and when opening formal events, we start by saying, “Assalamualaikum” – may peace be upon you.

The cultural similarities between Sasak and Balinese can also be seen in traditional costume and music. Traditional Sasak men and women still wear the sarong in their daily lives, but I don’t. I only use the sarong for praying and religious events. When I attend wedding ceremonies, I use a traditional Sasak costume consisting of a suit, a series of *songket* and *batik* wraps, and a headpiece called the *capuk*.

Lombok culture and Balinese culture exist side by side here. In some places, one can see a mosque next to a Hindu temple, or *pura*, with activities in one taking place without disturbing the other. From time to time, you can hear the call for prayer, or *adzan*, from the mosque and the chants from the temple over the loudspeakers. Each religion coexists with the other, even supporting each other’s individual religious activities. For example, during the Ogoh-ogoh festival, which the Balinese Hindus hold the day before Nyepi, the Sasak people take part in *gamelan* and *gendang beleq* performances.

The Sasak tradition is the most definitive cultural element that influences art and design, and continues to inspire various aspects of life. One can see authentic Sasak motifs and design in the woven materials used both as daily apparel and as traditional costume. The traditional

motifs used in *songket* and woven fabrics are *subhanale* and *ragi genep*. The *songket* is a hand-woven fabric made from a combination of cotton, silk and gold or silver laminated thread. In the past, the *songket* was mainly used for traditional occasions, but nowadays, people have started to use it in their daily formal apparel. Besides the *songket*, the traditional motifs of *subahnale* and *ragi genep* are also used in interior and graphic design.

The most recognisable form of traditional music in Sasak culture is *gendang beleq*, which is used in wedding ceremonies and to welcome guests at a formal event. A *gendang beleq* performance involves various traditional instruments, usually including two huge drums, gongs, and various kinds of metal percussion. There is also the *Sekeha*, which is a kind of *gamelan* music that is typically played for traditional dances. Sasak pop songs have also been gaining popularity, especially in the cafés of more touristic areas like Gili Trawangan and Senggigi. There's even a Sasak singer that has started introducing the Sasak language into his reggae-inspired music.

06



Tessa Bunney/In Pictures/Corbis



Konstantin Trubavin/Demotix/Corbis

PASSPORT TO INDONESIA

LANGUAGE:

Indonesian Javanese

TRAVEL TIPS:

When changing notes at registered moneychangers, remember to check if they discount the value of bills lower than US\$100.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, Jakarta

Airlines:

Garuda Indonesia, Lion Air, Japan Airlines

CURRENCY:

Indonesian Rupiah (US\$1 = 12,900 IDR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

When eating, receiving or giving something, always use your right hand. While visitors are allowed to take photos of places of worship, ask for permission first. Use both hands when you are greeting someone with a handshake, but remember that some Muslim women prefer to avoid contact.

HOTELS:

Hotel Indonesia Kempinski Jakarta

www.kempinski.com/en/jakarta/hotel-indonesia/welcome

Citi M Hotel

www.citimhotel.com

Cipta Hotel

www.ciptahotel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Tanjung Puting National Park
- Borobudur
- Torajaland

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

May–September

FESTIVALS:

- Good Friday, April 3
- Independence Day, August 17
- Muharram, October 14

PASSPORT TO LOMBOK

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Lombok International Airport

Airlines:

SilkAir

07



Justin Ong

08

08 On the way up to the peak of Rinjani leaving home behind for a view of the world

09 Ever been to a place where the sky literally meets the water? At 2,000 metres, Lake Segara Anak, or Child of the Sea, is named because the blue hue of the water remind locals of the sea

10 Hot springs at Mount Rinjani: A magical experience before the climb up to Camp Two

“*Sasak cuisine is dominated by spicy and salty flavours. Every meal is served with an additional side plate of salt to satisfy the Sasak palate, which tends to crave a little extra salt.*”

Sasak cuisine is dominated by spicy and salty flavours. Every meal is served with an additional side plate of salt to satisfy the Sasak palate, which tends to crave a little extra salt. Another staple in Lombok cooking is *terasi*, or shrimp paste, which is used in almost every savoury dish as a flavour enhancer and seasoning.

Pelecing kangkung (blanched *kangkung*, bean sprouts and string beans served with sambal topped with shredded coconut and fried peanuts), *urap* (various blanched vegetables tossed with shredded coconut) and roasted *pelecing* chicken are popular local fare across the island. *Pelecing* is a combination of chillies, tomatoes, shrimp paste, salt and key lime juice used as a marinade or sauce for vegetables and grilled fish or chicken. Lombok locals like their food extra spicy so they use small yellow and orange chilli padi, a much spicier version of the big red chilli that serves as a red food colouring. If you're not sweating from the spiciness, then the food is not good enough!

My favourite dish is the famous Taliwang chicken, both the fried and the grilled versions. Just the smell of the chicken roasting gets me drooling. It's called Taliwang chicken because it was mainly sold by people who come from a village in Mataram city called Kampung Taliwang. The chicken requires various preparation steps. It is first rubbed with coarse sea salt, then grilled over a coal fire, followed by either deep-frying or basting with *pelecing* sauce, and then grilled again. The meat is served with a spicy coconut sauce and sambal. The difference between the Taliwang *pelecing* sauce used for fish or chicken and the one used for vegetables is the use of dried red chillies, which adds a smoky flavour.

One of the places that I still enjoy visiting is Gili Trawangan. From the 1980s to the mid-1990s, Gili Trawangan was a hip and happening





place to enjoy island life and entertainment, quite unlike what you find in the city. At that time, there were only a few hotels, and most of the structures were traditionally built with bamboo walls and coconut leaf roofs. Mosquito nets were rather in demand, to say the least. There was neither air conditioning nor fans because electricity was scarce. One could go anywhere on the island because no one had claim to any specific area. Today, Gili Trawangan is known as the party island and is crowded with budget and five-star hotels, dive centres, strefet-side and beachside cafés, as well as small businesses offering bike and snorkelling equipment rental.

Most of the beach side of the island has been claimed by cafés, restaurants and resorts, not to mention the many dive boats and ferries moored along the beach. Although motor vehicles are not allowed in Gili Trawangan, the streets are filled with *cidomo*, or horse carts, and tourists riding bikes or walking around. Even so, it still remains a must-see place in Lombok.

Senggigi Beach is another area worth visiting. In the past, the beach was not considered a tourist area because access was very limited, with narrow

“Lombok’s greatest cultural asset is the hospitality of the Sasak people. Family values and relationships are still considered very essential.”

11 Soft coral (*Dendronephthya* sp) frames a ghost goby (*Pleurosicya micheli*): A spectacular scene common around the gilis of Lombok

12 A fishing boat at sunset in Gili Asahan, Lombok



Fadil Aziz/Alcibbum Photography/Alcibbum Photography/Corbis

paths connected by flimsy wooden bridges, and there were hardly any public facilities. But since hotels started developing in the area, Senggigi has rapidly evolved into one of the most accessible places in Lombok. Only around 30 minutes from Mataram city, it is one of the routes leading to the harbour that offer transport to the *gilis*.

For me, Lombok’s greatest cultural asset is the hospitality of the Sasak people. Family values and relationships are still considered very essential, and people that come from the same village are still thought of as family. This strong bond can be seen in the way locals celebrate important moments in life like marriage, the birth of a baby, religious events, even death. Sasak people will always help one another, both materially and spiritually, in holding various ceremonies.

It is also impressive that many areas still hold dear their ancient traditions, even to this day. In Bayan, which is about 80 kilometres from Mataram, the people hold elaborate ceremonies to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. They devote three full days to the preparations, with the women washing rice in the local river before preparing the main dishes, which are served to the entire village. People in villages like Bayan and Sade still live their lives and maintain their environment in the traditional way – the way their ancestors did when they first settled on this idyllic island. AGP

LALU BRAMANTIO (TIO) GANERU



Lalu Bramantio (Tio) Ganeru was born in Mataram. His father comes from a line of ancient Sasak natives. He has spent most of his life in this city, except for the years living in Jogjakarta during his college years. He now works as a civil servant in the Municipality Office of Mataram. In one of the youth activities that he was involved in, he met my wife, Nina Karina Karim, who hails from Palembang. Tio and Nina want their children to love and get to know the beauty of their land and culture.

Lombok's Lush Oasis

AN ISLAND'S NATURAL SPLENDOUR

Kebun Villas & Resort sits amidst one of the well-known tourism areas in Senggigi, Lombok. Although this area is more popular for its coastline and beaches, the surrounding hillside holds its own beauty. Rivalling the scenic coastline of the Senggigi strip, the acclivity is adorned with creases and valleys filled with luscious vegetation. Nestled against the slopes of the mound that enhances the magnificence of the green hills, Kebun offers a view of the ocean at a whole new level, while presenting the verdant of the tropics with a symphony of chirping birds and rustling trees.

This garden home is perched on a cliff in the picturesque precipice of Senggigi just a 10-minute walk from Senggigi beach and art market. It is imbued with Nature's milieu, where many indigenous plants shape

the landscape and gardens. From the *kaong* or sweet palm to the plethora of trees of the pandan, banana and mango kind, to the frangipani, bamboo and coconut, the soul of Lombok is beautifully retained within the luxurious walls of Kebun Villas & Resort.

Sights of gleeful flowers greet you on the way to the longest infinity pool in Lombok, the 75-metre pool itself on the same flow with the dancing treetops.

The luxurious villas are certainly part of this hotel's opulent offerings, prized for its comfortable amplitude offering modern Balinese-style furnishings, with some of the more spacious villas having a private pool enclave and others offering just one of the most wanton views of Senggigi beach.





After a full day out appreciating some of the richest of cultures and gift of Nature, there's nothing like returning to the access of bliss in the villa's beautiful boudoirs, its spacious parlour and plush bath areas. Why, even with a family coddling three young 'uns, Kebun Villas & Resort's villas manage to gratify every expectation one would have of a resort stay.

Indeed, there is no greater satisfaction to observe every family need fulfilled, from their whimsical wishes to deluxe desires, from being constantly connected to being completely entertained in the hotel's premier facilities. Lounging in the parlour, jumping in the pool, lazing in the bedrooms or simply soaking in the breathtaking gifts of Lombok, it truly leaves guests wanting for nothing.

Looking out into the horizon, you'll hear the call to prayer in the distant, connecting you to the elegance of this island's inheritance and ancestry.

With the setting sun, there is the opportunity to explore the resort's culinary spreads from Bamboo Restaurant's delectable grill, staying true to Lombok's palatable traditions.

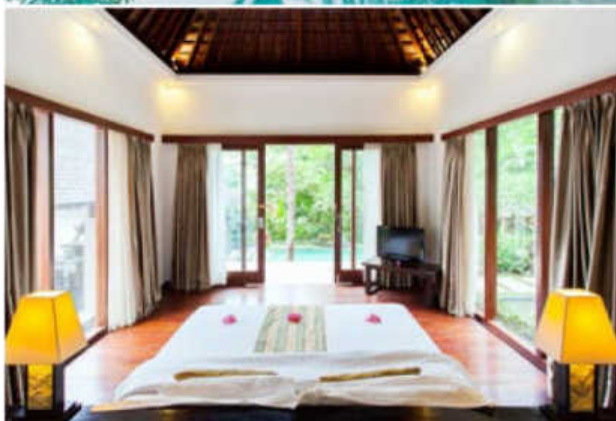
The excitement never stops, where even over dinner, noisy chatter in expectation of the following day's activities was reason enough to keep guests titillated with a sense of adventure. Sign up for tours, engage in bird-watching around the resort, go hiking, take leisure walks to the highest point of the estate to watch the sun set or just sit by the pool all day long, it's satisfying in every way.

Leaving Kebun is always bittersweet. For sure, it gives every reason to keep returning. It certainly always gives us the opportunity to enjoy a different side of Senggigi. With its friendly staff, sense of place and warm Indonesian hospitality, this resort will definitely always provide a luxurious, yet cozy place, to get away and leave your city worries behind – yes, the proverbial home away from home.

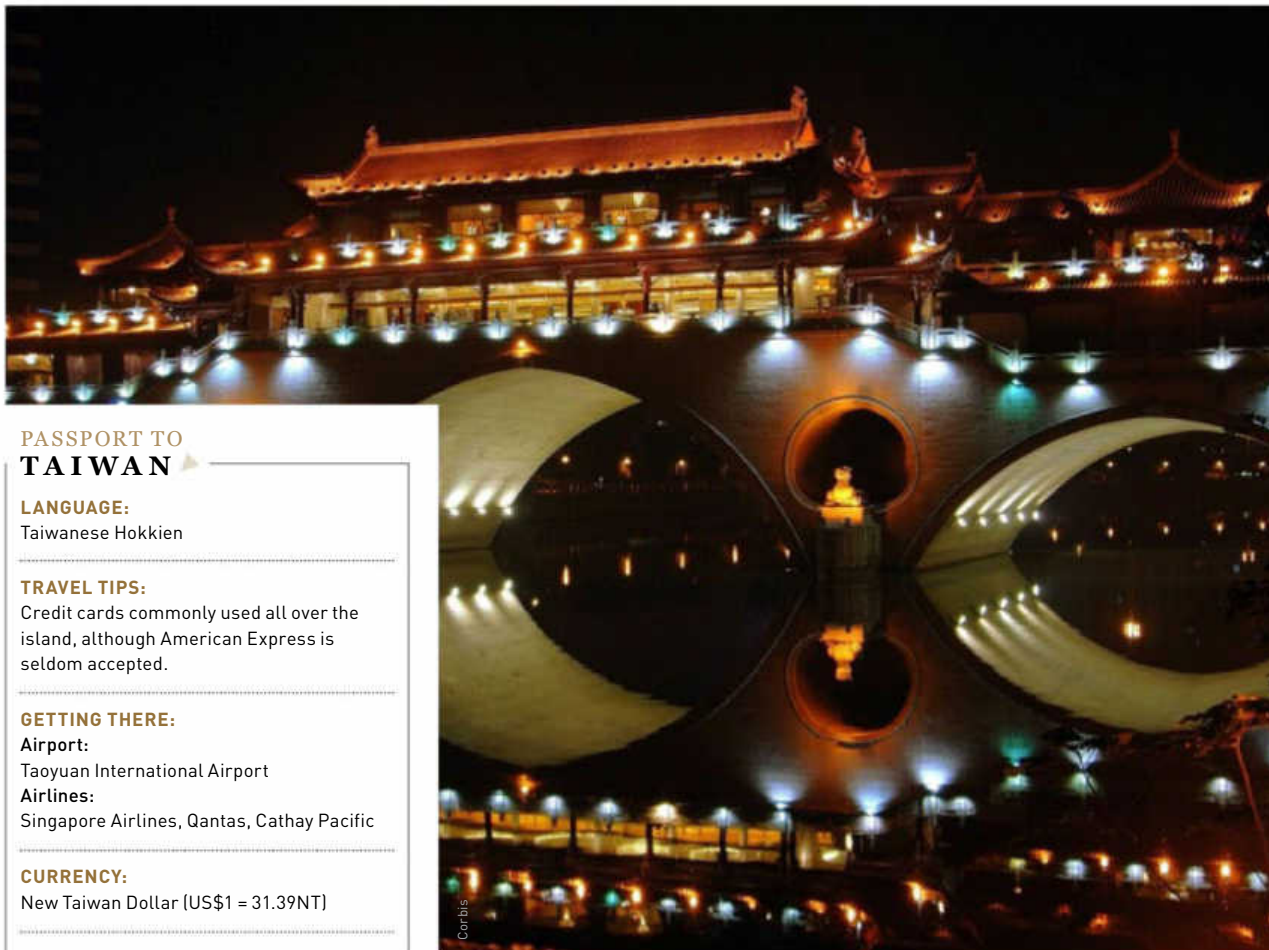
info@kebunresort.com
#kebunvillas_resort
www.soundcloud.com/kebunresort
www.kebuntravelogs.wordpress.com
www.facebook.com/kebunresort
www.vimeo.com/kebunresort
www.kebunresort.com

**JALAN RAYA KEBUN
KM.8
SENGGIGI, LOMBOK
NTB-INDONESIA
83355**

By Tio Ganeru Photos Courtesy of Kebun Villas & Resort







PASSPORT TO TAIWAN

LANGUAGE:

Taiwanese Hokkien

TRAVEL TIPS:

Credit cards commonly used all over the island, although American Express is seldom accepted.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Taoyuan International Airport

Airlines:

Singapore Airlines, Qantas, Cathay Pacific

CURRENCY:

New Taiwan Dollar (US\$1 = 31.39NT)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Do extend your hand for a friendly handshake upon meeting new people.
- Always take your shoes off when you enter someone's home. The host will usually provide a pair of slippers to wear while indoors.
- At finer hotels, it is appropriate to tip modestly.

HOTELS:

Mandarin Oriental, Taipei

www.mandarinoriental.com

W TAIPEI

www.wtaipei.com

Backpacker's Inn

www.backpackerstw.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Taipei 101
- National Palace Museum
- Raohe Street Night Market

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

Fall (September to November)

FESTIVALS:

- Chinese New Year (Feb 19 – Mar 5)
- Mid-Autumn Festival (Sep 27)
- Dragon Boat Festival (Jun 20)

PASSPORT TO CHINA

LANGUAGE:

Chinese

TRAVEL TIPS:

Toilet paper is rarely found in public restrooms, so be mindful about carrying your own supplies.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Beijing Capital Airport and Shanghai Pudong International Airport

Airlines:

Air China, Malaysia Airlines, Virgin Atlantic

CURRENCY:

Chinese Yuan (US\$1 = 6.24 Yuan)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Always accept business cards with both hands outstretched.
- Do not arrive at someone's home empty-handed.
- When dining with others, never stick your

chopsticks into your bowl of rice as it is considered an inauspicious gesture.

HOTELS:

Grand Hyatt Beijing

www.beijing.grand.hyatt.com/en/hotel/home.html

Regent Beijing

www.regenthoteles.com/EN/Beijing

Shanghai Blue Mountain Youth Hostel

www.bmhostel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Forbidden City
- Great Wall of China
- Yuyuan Garden

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

September to October

FESTIVALS:

- Chinese New Year (Feb 19 – Mar 5)
- Dragon Boat Festival (Jun 20)
- Shoton Festival (August 14)*

* Celebrated in Tibet

PASSPORT TO HONG KONG ▼

LANGUAGE:

Cantonese

TRAVEL TIPS:

There are fast ferries to and from Macau. These services operate from the Hong Kong–Macau Ferry Terminal in Sheung Wan on Hong Kong Island; the China Ferry terminal in Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon; and the Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal in Tuen Mun, New Territories.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Hong Kong International Airport

Airlines:

Lufthansa, Vietnam Airlines, Singapore Airlines

CURRENCY:

Hong Kong Dollar (US\$1 = 7.76 HKD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- When dining in company, fill others' teacups before your own.

- Don't feel the need to leave tips, as it is not customary to do so here.
- Don't wear blue or white in social settings as these are regarded as mourning colours.

HOTELS:

The Peninsula Hong Kong
www.hongkong.peninsula.com/en
Metropark Hotel Causeway Bay
www.metroparkhotel.com/eng
Yesinn
www.yesiinn.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- The Peak
- Tsim Sha Tsui Promenade
- Temple Street Night Market and Ladies' Market

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

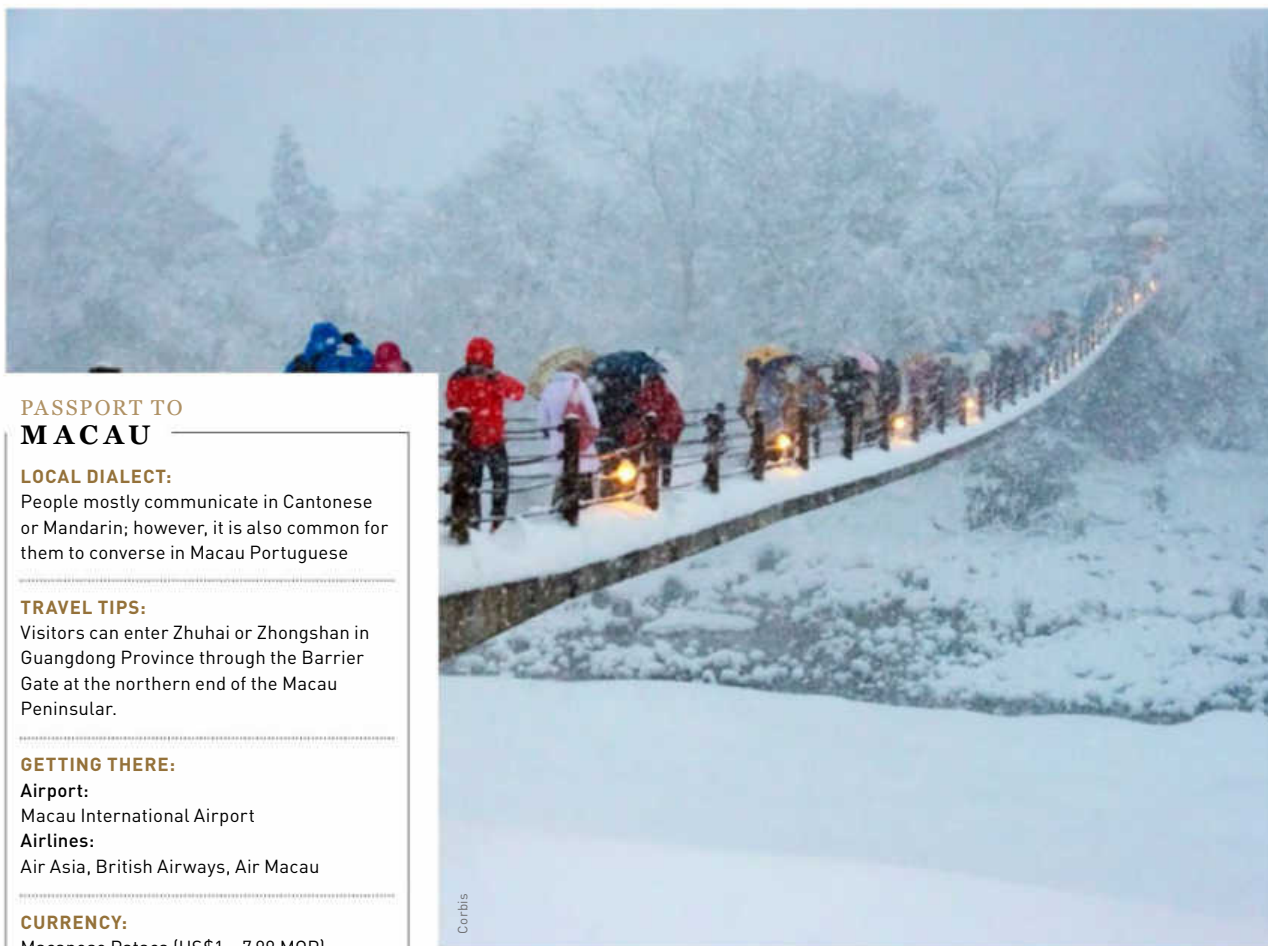
Early spring (March and April)

FESTIVALS:

- Kwan Tai (Aug 8)
- Mid-Autumn Festival (Sep 27)
- Buddha's Birthday (May 25)



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PASSPORT TO MACAU

LOCAL DIALECT:

People mostly communicate in Cantonese or Mandarin; however, it is also common for them to converse in Macau Portuguese

TRAVEL TIPS:

Visitors can enter Zhuhai or Zhongshan in Guangdong Province through the Barrier Gate at the northern end of the Macau Peninsular.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Macau International Airport

Airlines:

Air Asia, British Airways, Air Macau

CURRENCY:

Macanese Pataca (US\$1 = 7.99 MOP)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Do be punctual at all times.
- Offer a light handshake when greeting someone new.
- Do not dress skimpily at public beaches.

HOTELS:

The Venetian Macao

www.venetianmacao.com

Grand Lisboa

www.grandlisboa.com

Metropark Hotel

www.metroparkmacau.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Ruins of St. Paul's
- Senado Square
- Macau's Fisherman's Wharf

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

Fall (September to November)

FESTIVALS:

- Buddha's Birthday (May 25)
- Chong Yeung Festival (Oct 21)
- Winter Solstice (Dec 22)

PASSPORT TO JAPAN

LOCAL DIALECT:

Japanese

TRAVEL TIPS:

Book the flat-rate foreigners-only Japan Rail Pass, which can be used throughout the extensive JR train network

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Tokyo International Airport

Airlines:

Delta, Singapore Airlines, Jeju Air

CURRENCY:

Japanese Yen (US\$1 = 118.76 JPY)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Always take off your shoes/slippers if you are about to step onto a *tatami* mat (traditional flooring)
- A small nod is a polite form of greeting in Japan

- Do not pass food to other people using chopsticks as it is considered inauspicious

HOTELS:

Park Hotel Tokyo

www.parkhoteltokyo.com

Sounkyo Kanko Hotel

www.sounkyo-kankou.co.jp

K's House Tokyo

www.kshouse.jp

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Meiji Shrine
- Yoyogi Park
- Tokyo Skytree

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

March to May

FESTIVALS:

- Kamakura Snow Festival (Feb 15–16)
- Setsubun Mantoro (Feb 3)
- Sendai Tanabata Matsuri (Aug 6–8)



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PASSPORT TO MONGOLIA ►

LOCAL DIALECT:

Mongolian

TRAVEL TIPS:

It is strongly recommended to travel with local guides, as it is difficult for foreigners to navigate the countryside.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Chinngis Khaan International Airport

Airlines:

MIAT Mongolian Airlines, Air China, Turkish Airlines

CURRENCY:

Mongolian Tugrik (US\$1 = 1960MNT)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Do sit if there is seating in someone's home. Mongolians show respect for each other by sitting down.
- Don't refuse any tea or food offered to you. It is polite to try the wares offered before returning it.
- Roll down your sleeves when giving or receiving anything or before being introduced to someone older.

HOTELS:

Terelj Luxury Hotel

www.tereljhotel.com

Springs Hotel

www.springshotel.mn

Golden Gobi Guesthouse

www.goldengobi.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Gorkhi-Terelj National Park
- Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park
- Winter Palace of the Bogd Khan

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

Summer (July to September)

FESTIVALS:

- Tsagaan Sar (Feb 21)
- Naadam (Jul 11)
- Independence Day (Nov 26)

PASSPORT TO SOUTH KOREA ▲

LOCAL DIALECT:

Korean

TRAVEL TIPS:

Shopping in South Korea is largely duty-free and credit cards are accepted in all major departmental stores

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Incheon International Airport

Airlines:

Korea Airways, Emirates, Oman Air

CURRENCY:

South Korean Won (US\$1 = 1099.05 KRW)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Appointments are required for business meetings and should be made up to three or four weeks in advance.
- It is polite to pass or accept anything, especially money, with your right hand while

your left supports your forearm or wrist.

- Always remove your shoes when entering a Korean home.

HOTELS:

Grand Hyatt Seoul

www.seoul.grand.hyatt.com

IP Boutique Hotel

www.ipboutiquehotel.com

Backpackers INSIDE

www.insideseoulhostel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Myeong-dong
- Namsan
- N Seoul Tower

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

March through August

FESTIVALS:

- Korean New Year (Feb 18 –20)
- Harvest Festival (Sep 26–29)
- Hangeul Day (Oct 9)



PASSPORT TO ARMENIA

LANGUAGE:

Standard Eastern Armenian

TRAVEL TIPS:

While trade is only carried out in the national currency, several stores have money exchange desks.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Zvartnots International Airport, Yerevan

Airlines:

Air Armenia, Austrian Airlines, Avianca

CURRENCY:

Armenian Dram (US\$1 = 479 AMD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Neither males nor females commonly wear shorts – pants or dresses are the norm and neatness is valued.
- Smoking is very common, both indoors and in public places. Make a polite request if you do not want others to smoke in your room.

- There is a strong tipping culture, especially at restaurants and for taxis.

HOTELS:

Royal Tulip Grand Hotel Yerevan
www.goldentulip.com/en/hotels/royal-tulip-grand-hotel-yerevan

Shirak Hotel

www.shirakhotel.am

Envoy

www.envoyhostel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Tatev Monastery
- Mount Aragats
- Zvartnots Cathedral

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

September–November

FESTIVALS:

- Taraz Fest (Traditional Costumes of Armenia), July 11
- Vardavar (Water Day), July 12
- Vardenis Golden Wheat Festival, September 12



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PASSPORT TO AZERBAIJAN

LANGUAGE:

Azerbaijani

TRAVEL TIPS:

Most places in Azerbaijan prefer cash – credit cards and traveller's cheques are only accepted at a few locations.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Heydar Aliyev International Airport

Airlines:

Azerbaijan Airlines, Turkish Airlines, Qatar Airways

CURRENCY:

Azerbaijani Manat (US\$1 = 0.78 AZN)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Dressing conservatively is expected of both males and females.
- If you are offered a gift, it is polite to refuse twice before accepting it.
- Certain mosques may be off-limits to non-Muslims; wait to be invited inside.

HOTELS:

Jumeirah Bilgah Beach Hotel

www.jumeirah.com/en/hotels-resorts/baku/jumeirah-bilgah-beach-hotel/

Swan Hotel Baku

www.swan.az

Baku Palace

www.bakupalacehotel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

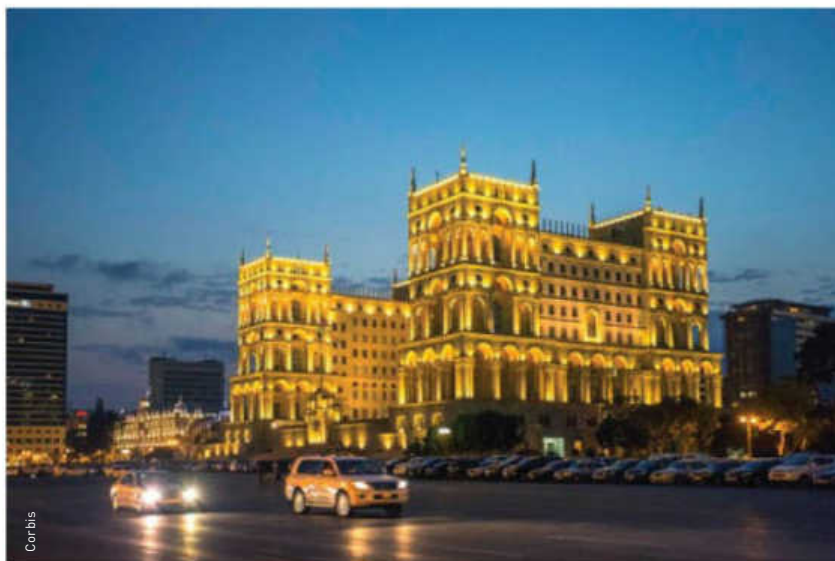
- Gobustan National Park
- Atashgah Fire Temple
- Yanar Bulag

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

September–December

FESTIVALS:

- Novruz Bayram (New Year), March 20–24
- Gurban Bayrami (Festival of Sacrifice), September 24–25
- World Azerbaijanis Solidarity Day, December 31



PASSPORT TO BAHRAIN

LANGUAGE:

Modern Standard Arabic

TRAVEL TIPS:

Credit cards are accepted in most department stores, but only cash is accepted at the *souks*, or bazaars.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Bahrain International Airport

Airlines:

Cathay Pacific, Gulf Air, Emirates

CURRENCY:

Bahraini Dinar (US\$1 = 0.38 BHD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- During Ramadan, visitors must not eat, drink, smoke or chew gum in public.
- Bahrainis tend to keep family matters private and personal questions must be avoided.

- If you are invited to a home, arrive on time, as punctuality is valued.

HOTELS:

The Gulf Hotel Bahrain

www.gulfhotehbahrain.com

Bahrain International Hotel

www.bahraininternationalhotel.com

Windsor Tower Hotel

www.goo.gl/IQSLMr

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Traditional Houses of Muharraq
- Bahrain National Museum
- Tree of Life

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

November–February

FESTIVALS:

- Milad Un Nabi (The Prophet's Birthday), January 3
- Al Hijra (Islamic New Year), October 13
- Bahrain National Day, December 16



PASSPORT TO CYPRUS ▼

LANGUAGE:

Cypriot Greek

TRAVEL TIPS:

While cheques and credit cards are commonly accepted in major cities and tourist areas, remote rural areas most frequently use cash.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Larnaca International Airport

Airlines:

Qatar Airways, Emirates, Lufthansa

CURRENCY:

Euro (US\$1 = 0.88 EUR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Do not refuse when someone offers you Greek coffee or a cold drink, as it is considered rude to do so.
- Ensure you give respect to elders, as Cypriots are mindful of hierarchies of age and position.
- Finish everything on your plate and place your cutlery on the right side to indicate that you have finished your meal.

HOTELS:

Elysium Hotel Cyprus

www.elysium-hotel.com

Hotel Kapetanios Odyssia

www.kapetaniosgroup.com

San Remo Hotel

www.san-remo-hotel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Buffavento Castle
- Fig Tree Bay
- Laiki Geitonia neighbourhood

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

November–February

FESTIVALS:

- Shrove Monday, February 23
- Ochi Day, October 28
- Christmas, December 25

PASSPORT TO EGYPT

LANGUAGE:

Egyptian Arabic

TRAVEL TIPS:

Most major credit and debit cards are widely accepted in various hotels and shops.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Cairo International Airport

Airlines:

EgyptAir, Etihad Airways, Lufthansa

CURRENCY:

Egyptian Pound (US\$1 = 7.63 EGP)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Use your right hand for eating, passing objects and greeting people.
- Ensure you remove your footwear before entering a house.
- Do not take photographs of the locals without prior permission.

HOTELS:

La Residence des Cascades

www.residencecascades.com

Havana Hotel

www.havanahotelcairo.com

Hotel Concorde Dokki

www.concordehotel-egypt.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Pyramids of Giza
- Valley of the Kings
- Montazah Palace Gardens

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

October–May

FESTIVALS:

- Sham el-Nessim (Spring Festival), April 13
- Sinai Liberation Day, April 25
- Al Hijra (Islamic New Year), October 13

PASSPORT TO GEORGIA

LANGUAGES:

Georgian, Svan

TRAVEL TIPS:

Electrical supplies may be intermittent from November to March.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Tbilisi Airport

Airlines:

Georgian Airways, Turkish Airlines, Lufthansa

CURRENCY:

Georgian Lari (US\$1 = 2.05 GEL)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Handshakes are a common way of greeting others when you meet and when you are leaving.
- Only family members or close friends use first names to address one another.
- Try to taste all the dishes at a meal and ensure you finish the food on your plate.

HOTELS:

Hotel Coral

www.coralhotel.ge

Tiflis Palace

www.tiflispalace.ge

Charm Hotel

www.hotelcharm.ge

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Narikala fortress
- Vashlovani National Park
- Armazi

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

July–August

FESTIVALS:

- March Equinox, March 20
- Svetitskhovloba, October 14
- St George's Day, November 23



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PASSPORT TO IRAQ ▶

LANGUAGE:

Mesopotamian Arabic, Kurdish

TRAVEL TIPS:

Credit card usage is not common as the economy is largely cash-based.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Baghdad International Airport

Airlines:

Iraqi Airways, Lufthansa, Etihad Airways

CURRENCY:

Iraqi Dinar (US\$1 = 1,174 IQD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Place your right hand over your heart as a sign of respect or thanks.
- Do not stand close to or touch an Iraqi woman.
- Do not make the "thumbs-up" sign as it is considered obscene.

HOTELS:

Erbil Rotana

www.rotana.com/rotanahotelandresorts/iraq/erbil/erbilrotana

Babylon Warwick Hotel

www.warwickhotels.com/babylon-hotel

Al-Mansour Hotel

www.almansourhotel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Kurdish Textile Museum
- Hanging Gardens of Babylon
- Great Mosque of Samarra

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

January–February, October–November

FESTIVALS:

- Milad Un Nabi (The Prophet's Birthday), January 3
- Republic Day, July 14
- Al Hijra (Islamic New Year), October 13



PASSPORT TO JORDAN

LANGUAGES:

South Levantine Spoken Arabic,
Standard Arabic

TRAVEL TIPS:

Most places of business in Amman and Aqaba accept major credit cards. Furthermore, there are plenty of ATMs, except in smaller towns and villages.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Queen Alia International Airport

Airlines:

Royal Jordanian, Etihad Airways,
Singapore Airlines

CURRENCY:

Jordanian Dinar (US\$1 = 0.71 JOD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Eat finger food with the fingertips of your right hand rather than the left.
- Stand when someone enters the room or when someone is being introduced.

- Don't interrupt or pass in front of a Muslim who is praying.

HOTELS:

Grand Hyatt Amman

www.amman.grand.hyatt.com

The Amman Pasha Hotel

www.ammanpashahotel.com

Jordan Tower Hotel

www.jordantoweramman.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Petra Historical City
- Dana Biosphere Reserve
- Ma'in Hot Springs

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

March–May

FESTIVALS:

- Lailat Al Miraj (The Prophet's Ascension), May 16
- Al Hijra (Islamic New Year), October 13
- Christmas, December 25

PASSPORT TO KUWAIT

LANGUAGE:

Modern Standard Arabic

TRAVEL TIPS:

Tipping is generally not necessary and a 12 percent service charge is added to bills in expensive hotels and restaurants.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Kuwait International Airport

Airlines:

Kuwait Airways, Thai Air, Turkish Airlines

CURRENCY:

Kuwaiti Dinar (US\$1 = 0.30 KWD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- It is normal to tip up to 12 percent at restaurants, but taxi drivers do not need to be tipped.
- Do shake hands with members of the same sex at meetings.

- Do not point at others with your index finger, as it is impolite.

HOTELS:

The Regency Kuwait

www.theregencykuwait.com

Oasis Hotel

www.oasis.com.kw

Swiss-Belhotel Plaza Kuwait

www.swiss-belhotel.com/Kuwait

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Grand Museum
- Al Hamra Tower
- Seif Palace

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

November–April

FESTIVALS:

- Hala February Festival, January 8–February 6
- Kuwait Food Festival, March 5–7
- Al Hijra (Islamic New Year), October 13

PASSPORT TO LEBANON

LANGUAGE:

Lebanese Arabic, French

TRAVEL TIPS:

Some businesses only accept cash rather than credit card payments. On the other hand, most ATMs can accommodate credit cards.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport

Airlines:

Middle East Airlines, Qatar Airways, Etihad Airways

CURRENCY:

Lebanese Pound (US\$1 = 1,505 LBP)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Note that dress codes vary by region and more rural regions or houses of worship call for conservative dressing.
- Eat Western-style food with cutlery

and Middle Eastern-style food with your right hand.

- Do not leave as soon as you are done with your meal as it is considered rude.

HOTELS:

Imperial Suites Beirut

www.imperialsuitesbeirut.com

Mövenpick Hotel Beirut

www.goo.gl/0Eyy9Q

Saifi Urban Gardens

www.saifigardens.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Jeita Grotto
- Kadisha Valley
- Mansouri Great Mosque

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

March–May

FESTIVALS:

- Orthodox Christmas, January 6
- Al Hijra (Islamic New Year), October 13
- Independence Day, November 22

PASSPORT TO OMAN

LANGUAGE:

Modern Standard Arabic

TRAVEL TIPS:

Most businesses prefer using cash rather than credit cards. Ensure you get small denominations to make it easier for you to bargain.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Muscat International Airport

Airlines:

Oman Air, Qatar Airways, Lufthansa

CURRENCY:

Omani Rial (US\$1 = 0.39 OMR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Ask for permission before taking photographs anywhere in Oman, and avoid taking photos of Omani women.
- Do not consume alcohol in public places.
- Do not enter a mosque unless you have permission.

HOTELS:

The Chedi

www.ghmhotels.com/en/muscat

Mövenpick Hotel Beirut

www.omanhotels.com/ruwi

Ramee Dream Resort

www.rameedreamresort-muscat.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque
- Qurum Natural Park
- Amouage Perfumery

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

November–March

FESTIVALS:

- Milad Un Nabi (The Prophet's Birthday), January 3
- Renaissance Day, July 23
- National Day, November 18



PASSPORT TO QATAR

LANGUAGE:

Qatar Arabic

TRAVEL TIPS:

ATMs and money exchange offices are available in the cities, especially near the more popular tourist destinations.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Hamad International Airport

Airlines:

Qatar Airways, Etihad Airways, Lufthansa

CURRENCY:

Qatari Rial (US\$1 = 3.64 QAR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- As a tourist, do not wear or imitate the Qatari national dress as it is considered disrespectful.
- Ask for permission before taking photographs. Photographing official buildings is not allowed.
- Dress conservatively at all places other than the beach and hotel swimming pool.

HOTELS:

Grand Hyatt Doha

www.doha.grand.hyatt.com

Kingsgate Hotel Doha

www.millenniumhotels.com/kingsgatedoha

La Villa Inn

www.lavillahospitality.com/Lavillainn

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Souq Wakif (bazaar)
- Arab Museum of Modern Art
- The Kingdom of Aladdin

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

November–March

FESTIVALS:

- Eid Al Fitr, July 18
- Eid Al Adha, September 23
- National Day, December 18



Corbis

PASSPORT TO SAUDI ARABIA

LANGUAGES:

Modern Standard Arabic, Najdi

TRAVEL TIPS:

Credit and debit cards are widely accepted and ATMs are easily accessible.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

King Fahd International Airport

Airlines:

Saudia, Qatar Airways, British Airways

CURRENCY:

Saudi Rial (US\$1 = 3.75 SAR)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Follow the Saudi dress code by covering your arms and legs, but don't wear any traditional local clothing.
- Avoid asking sensitive questions about religious practices or beliefs.
- Do not mix with the opposite sex in public.

HOTELS:

Burj Rafal Hotel Kempinski

www.goo.gl/0Ee3en

Ramada Madinah Al Qibla

www.goo.gl/1eIQjg

Al Khozama Hotel

www.rosewoodhotels.com/en/hotel-al-khozama-riyadh

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Al-Masjid al-Nabawi
- Nabatean tombs
- Masmak fortress

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

November–February

FESTIVALS:

- Souk Okaz (market gathering), January 15
- Jeddah Festival, month of June
- Eid Al Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice), September 23

PASSPORT TO PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

LANGUAGE:

Levantine Arabic

TRAVEL TIPS:

Both Israeli and Palestinian security services may ask for identification, so carry your passport with you at all times.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Gaza Airport

Airlines:

Palestinian Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Royal Jordanian Airlines

CURRENCY:

Israeli Shekel (US\$1 = 3.87 ILS)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Do not hold hands with members of the opposite sex in public.
- Avoid asking sensitive questions about religious practices or beliefs.
- Short skirts, low cut tops and shorts must be avoided.

HOTELS:

Mövenpick Hotel Ramallah

www.goo.gl/j1Feo7

The Bethlehem Hotel

www.bethlehemhotel.com

Nativity Bells Hotel

www.nativitybellshotel.ps

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Church of the Nativity
- Hebron Souk (bazaar)
- Hammam ash-Shifa (bath house)

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

September–October

FESTIVALS:

- Lailat al Miraj (Night of Ascension), May 16
- Independence Day, November 15
- Christmas, December 25

PASSPORT TO SYRIA ▼

LANGUAGE:

Western Neo-Aramaic

TRAVEL TIPS:

Traveller's cheques are hardly used in Syria; bring cash instead as credit cards are not universally used either.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Damascus International Airport

Airlines:

Syrian Air, Turkish Airlines,
Singapore Airlines

CURRENCY:

Syrian Pound (US\$1 = 188.9 SYP)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Tipping is optional for taxis; if you wish, SYP 10 is a suitable amount.
- Unless you are visiting a religious site, T-shirts and jeans are acceptable in major cities.

- Avoid making any critical comments about the Syrian government.

HOTELS:

Four Seasons Hotel Damascus
www.fourseasons.com/damascus
Orient Palace Hotel
www.orientpalacehotel.net
Blue Tower Hotel
www.bluetowerhotel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Temple of Bel
- Azm Palace
- Norias of Hama (water wheels)

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

March–May

FESTIVALS:

- Martyr's Day, May 6
- Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan), July 18
- Anniversary of October Liberation War, October 6



PASSPORT TO TURKEY

LANGUAGES:

Modern Standard Turkish, Kurdish

TRAVEL TIPS:

Major credit cards can be used to pay for most purchases. If you use a credit card to book flights, ferries or cars, ensure you bring the same card with you as authorities may ask to see it.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Istanbul Ataturk Airport

Airlines:

Turkish Airlines, Lufthansa, Singapore Airlines

CURRENCY:

Turkish Lira (US\$1 = 2.45 TRY)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Try to eat everything on your plate when served food, as it may be offensive if you do not.
- Maintain eye contact when you speak with someone, as this is a sign of integrity.
- Do not be offended by others smoking at a meal as this is a common practice in Turkey.

HOTELS:

Kempinski Hotel Barbaros Bay Bodrum
www.kempinski.com/en/bodrum/hotel-barbaros-bay
Balance Hotel Taksim
www.balancehoteltaksim.com
Hanedan Hotel
www.hanedanhotel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Hagia Sophia
- Mount Nemrut
- Grand Bazaar

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

April–May, September–October

FESTIVALS:

- Eid Al Adha, May 19
- Victory Day, August 30
- Kurban Bayrami (Sacrifice Feast), September 23

PASSPORT TO UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

LANGUAGE:

Modern Standard Arabic

TRAVEL TIPS:

Tipping is not compulsory, but is common practice. Gratuities to staff at hotels are at your discretion, while most restaurants add a service charge to the bill.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Abu Dhabi International Airport, Dubai International Airport, Sharjah International Airport, Fujairah International Airport

Airlines:

Etihad Airways, Emirates, Singapore Airlines

CURRENCY:

United Arab Emirates Dirham (US\$1 = 3.67 AED)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Do not drink alcohol while walking in the street and note that it is illegal to be drunk in a public place.
- Clothing should not be transparent, indecently expose parts of the body, or display offensive pictures or slogans.
- Do not eat, drink, smoke or play loud music in public during Ramadan, the fasting period.

HOTELS:

Jumeira Beach Hotel
www.goo.gl/TFv63D
Golden Tulip
www.goldentulipsharjah.com/en
Al Diar Regency Hotel
www.aldiarhotels.com/aldiarregencyhotel

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Sheikh Ziyed Grand Mosque
- Hajar Mountains
- Burj Khalifa

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

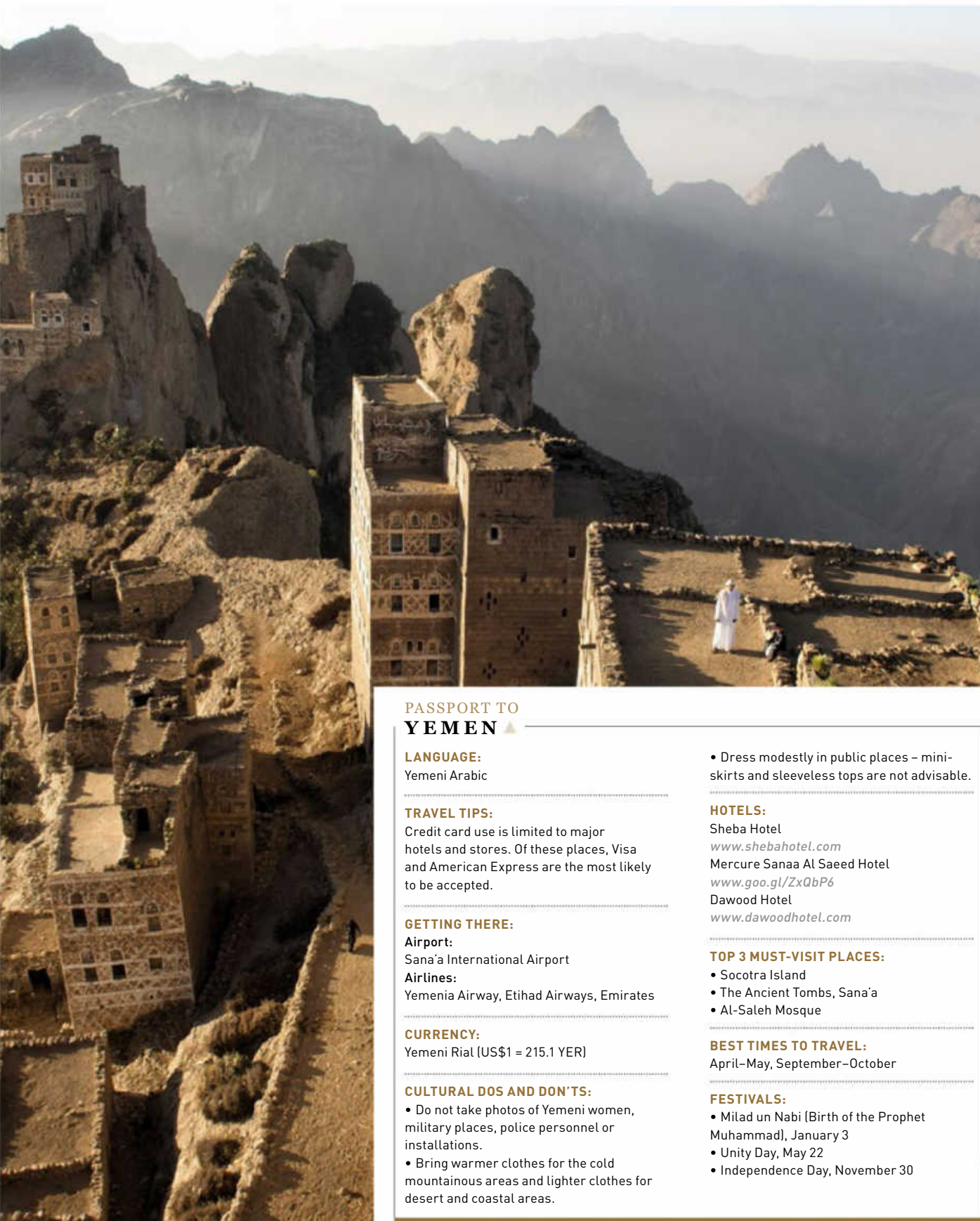
September–May

FESTIVALS:

- Israa & Mi'raj Night (Ascension of the Prophet), May 16
- Hijri New Years Day, October 15
- National Day, December 2



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PASSPORT TO YEMEN ▲

LANGUAGE:
Yemeni Arabic

TRAVEL TIPS:
Credit card use is limited to major hotels and stores. Of these places, Visa and American Express are the most likely to be accepted.

GETTING THERE:
Airport:
Sana'a International Airport
Airlines:
Yemenia Airway, Etihad Airways, Emirates

CURRENCY:
Yemeni Rial (US\$1 = 215.1 YER)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Do not take photos of Yemeni women, military places, police personnel or installations.
- Bring warmer clothes for the cold mountainous areas and lighter clothes for desert and coastal areas.

• Dress modestly in public places – mini-skirts and sleeveless tops are not advisable.

HOTELS:
Sheba Hotel
www.shebahotel.com
Mercure Sanaa Al Saeed Hotel
www.goo.gl/ZxQbP6
Dawood Hotel
www.dawoodhotel.com

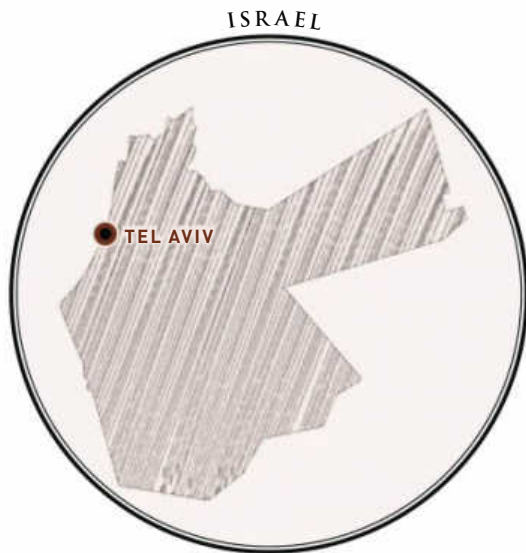
TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Socotra Island
- The Ancient Tombs, Sana'a
- Al-Saleh Mosque

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:
April–May, September–October

FESTIVALS:

- Milad un Nabi (Birth of the Prophet Muhammad), January 3
- Unity Day, May 22
- Independence Day, November 30



ISRAEL

THE ENCHANTED CITY

TALES OF TEL AVIV

text

BY LIRON SHIMONI



My grandparents from both sides arrived in Israel on an immigrant ship from Bulgaria in 1964, and for them, as for many other European Jews, it was a dream come true, a state where they could finally feel safe and not hide who they were. They set up home in the southern region of Tel Aviv, near Jaffa, where the Israeli government relocated the new civilians from Eastern Europe and North Africa.

My grandparents bought a two-room apartment with thin walls where they could clearly hear the conversations of their neighbours. The mixture of people from Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, Yemen, Morocco, Libya and other countries was complicated, but they had no other choice.

I was the second of two sons to join the family. I had a wonderful childhood with lots of friends from different cultural backgrounds, each family I visited having its own language, flavours and smells, and I was happy to be exposed to different traditions. There's no doubt that the cultural mixture I grew up in is one of the reasons why I am so interested in the world's cultures, and why I ended up doing a masters in visual anthropology. In the afternoons, a friend and I would go to the beach or walk around the port, watching the fishermen preparing their boats for a long night out at sea.

**NOTE TO SELF:
A MUST VISIT**

ABU HASAN RESTAURANT

Hadolfin 1 Street, Tel Aviv

GUETTA RESTAURANT

Jerusalem Avenue 6, Tel Aviv

PASHA RESTAURANT

Ha'arba'a 8 Street, Tel Aviv

01 One of many sophisticated bar restaurants along the coast, set against the backdrop of Tel Aviv



PASSPORT TO ISRAEL

LANGUAGES:

Hebrew, Yiddish

TRAVEL TIPS:

If tips are not already included in your tour package, tip about US\$60 per day to a guide driving a private car for up to three passengers.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Ben Gurion International Airport

Airlines:

EL AL Airlines, Arkia Israel Airlines,
Hainan Airlines

CURRENCY:

Israeli Shekel (US\$1 = 3.87 ILS)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- While casual wear is suitable in most places, ensure you dress more conservatively when visiting a place of worship.
- It is not customary to finish all the food on your plate.

- Bargain while shopping, both at bazaars and at malls.

HOTELS:

David Citadel Hotel

www.thedavidcitadel.co.il

The Rimonim Ha'Ma'ayan Nazareth Hotel

www.rimonimhotels.com/rimonim-hamaayan-nazareth

Lev Yerushalayim Hotel

www.levjerusalem.co.il/InternetSite

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Rosh Hanikra (grottoes)
- Mount of Olives
- Dome of the Rock

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

April–May

FESTIVALS:

- Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day), May 17
- Hanukkah, December 7
- December Solstice, December 22

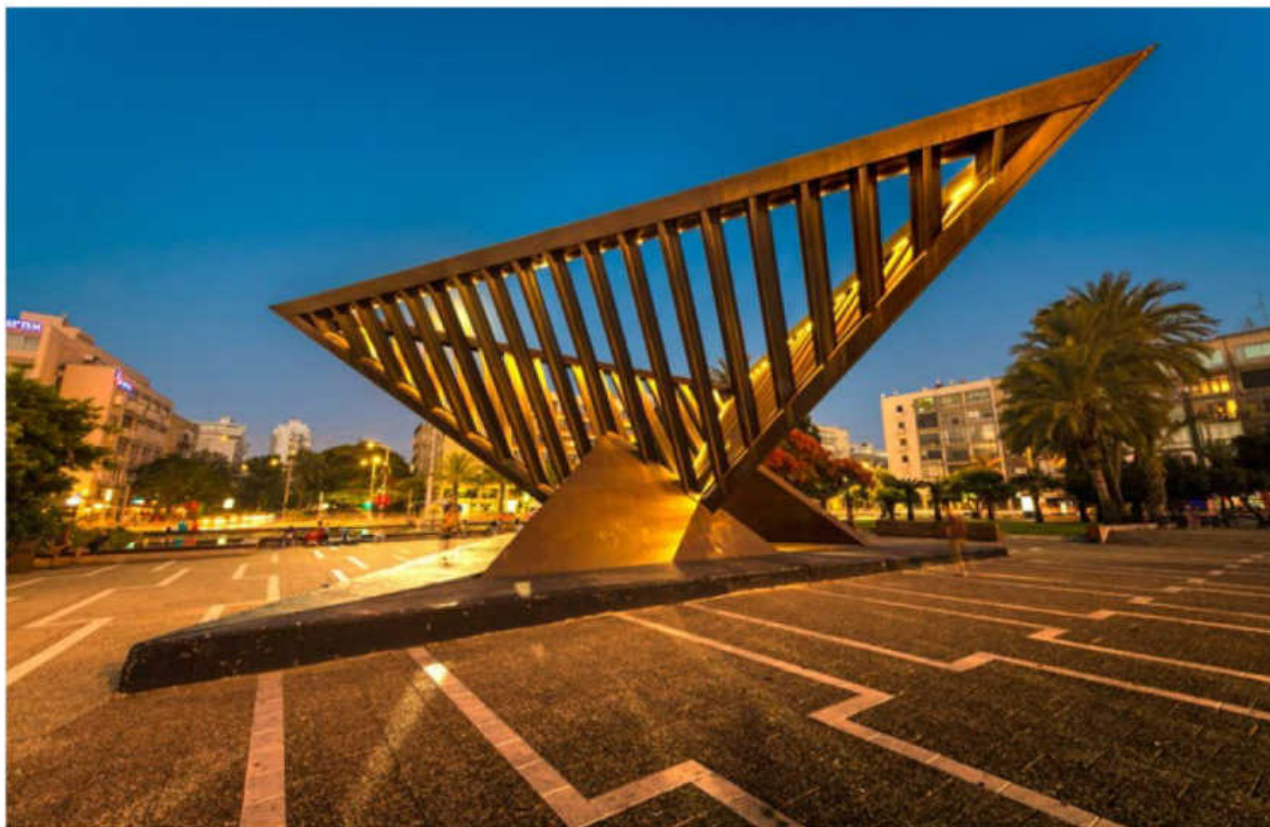
“Living on the stitch between the Jewish city of Tel Aviv and the Muslim city of Jaffa, I got to visit this wonderful port many times, and I was amazed to discover that this was one of the first ports to be established in the Mediterranean Sea.”

02 Stunning sunsets are common along Tel Aviv's beaches

03 Ode to art: One of the city's illuminated sculptures in Yitzhak Rabin Square

04 Soaking in the local charm: A beautifully-set bar in the trendy Neve Tzedek neighbourhood





03

When I was 16, I preferred spending my days on the beach rather than in school, and I especially looked forward to Friday evenings, when we, the youngsters of the neighbourhood, gathered on a hidden strip of the beach, played the drums and danced till sunset.

This little sandy beach, now called the Drums Beach, was truly a sight to behold. It was here that I used my simple camera – a gift from my father – to take my first pictures, documenting the characters surrounding my childhood; some were regular folks, while others were visitors passing through. Drums Beach is, as well, the place where I learnt one of the most important skills in photo documentary – how to assimilate into the crowd, observe and become “invisible”.

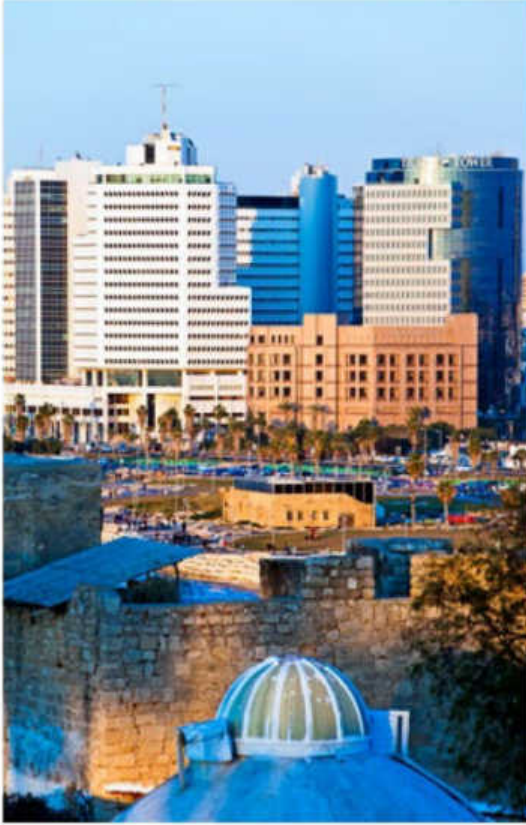
One of the places where I still like visiting that has maintained some of its authenticity is Jaffa Port. Living on the stitch between the Jewish city of Tel Aviv and the Muslim city of Jaffa, I got to visit this wonderful port many times, and I was amazed to discover that this was one of the first ports to be established in the Mediterranean Sea. Twelve narrow alleys lead to the port, and each one of them is named after a different zodiac sign. An old belief says that he who finds his sign, runs up and down the alley three times and makes a wish, will see it come true.

At the port, Arab fishermen can still be seen selling their merchandise or repairing their fishing nets while smoking sweet tobacco with a narghile, a Turkish water pipe that found its way to Israel in the 16th century while it was still part of the Ottoman Empire. I clearly remember as a child being charmed by the Arabs’ simple and fascinating culture – and I still am today.

Not far from the port stands the Abu Hasan restaurant, known mainly to the locals. It serves only one dish – traditional humus. For many years, the owner of the place used to sell humus on a mobile wagon in the streets and in 1959, he decided to open a small restaurant



04



Gavin Heller/JAI/Corbis

“Dining in Abu Hasan is not only a culinary experience, but a cultural one as well.”

on a hill that faced the sea. Dining in Abu Hasan is not only a culinary experience, but a cultural one as well. Because of the lack of space, all the diners sit next to each other at the same table, making it a typical Israeli social gathering – noisy, sarcastic and funny. The restaurant has no official operating hours; it opens at eight o'clock in the morning and closes when they run out of humus.

On Jerusalem Avenue, in front of the Noga Theatre, there is a small but superb restaurant run by the Guetta family that maintains an old traditional Tripolitan Jew kitchen. Their secret recipes have been kept in the family for generations, and thanks to Leah, the mother and the heart of the place, the diners can partake in a delicious stew, couscous and other Tripolitan dishes that have been enjoyed for decades.

Pasha is a culinary corner that specialises in authentic Turkish and Mediterranean cooking. It is located right in the heart of the lively urban centre of Tel Aviv and offers a colourful atmosphere and a great variety of starters, such as Arab salads, Moroccan *sambusak*, stuffed vine leaves, and soups in winter. Among the main courses, you will find Turkish kebabs, lamb kebabs and chops, a large selection of fish, and more.



Atlantide Phototravel/Corbis

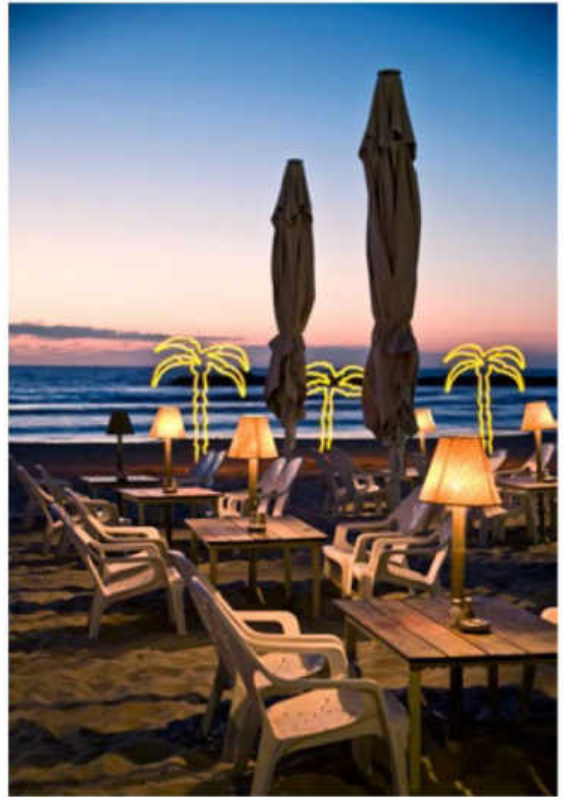
One of Tel Aviv's elements that has always drawn my attention is the Bauhaus architecture, introduced to the city by German-Jewish architects, that gives the city its name, "The White City". This unique architecture and design is characterised by asymmetry, compositions of primary volumes (cubic and rounded), ribbon windows, pilots, "thermometer" windows, balconies, roof terraces, and plays of shadow and light. Some of these elements are also important in my work as a photographer.

In September 1892, the first railway in Israel was established in Tel Aviv and was inaugurated in the presence of an emissary of the Turkish Sultan and the governor of the Jerusalem district. In the 1920s, the Wieland family founded a building materials factory near the station and settled there, establishing a family home known as, "Villa Wieland".

On the eve of the war of Israeli independence, the place was abandoned and hidden for many years, used as an imaginary playground for children and a love nest for young couples, until it found use as a military base. In 2000, the mayor approved a plan to restore the historical site and now, it is a complex for restaurants, cafés and art galleries.

Today, Tel Aviv is a very different city to the one I grew up in. Many of its original inhabitants left, and in their place, youth people from around the country settled in, bringing new life to the city. The city embraces and integrates anyone, and creates a unique experience of a "non-stop city".

Despite all the changes, Tel Aviv will always be the city where I grew up. Each tree and each stone are part of my childhood memories and for me, it will always be a source of inspiration. **AGP**



Richard T. Nowitz/Corbis



05 A gorgeous view of life at the city's beachfront scene framed by downtown buildings

06 The spectacular city skyline, viewed from the ancient port of Jaffa

07 Open-air dining is all the rage in Tel Aviv, which enjoys great weather year round

LIRON SHIMONI



Liron Shimoni is an Israeli photographer, writer and visual anthropologist. He specialises in documenting the world's cultures. His pictures and articles are published in magazines and publications around the world.

North Asia

♦ ♦ ♦

● ST PETERSBURG

● MOSCOW

TUVA

VLADIVOKSTOK

The federal subjects of Russia are the constituent entities of Russia. Since March 18, 2014, the Russian Federation consists of 85 federal subjects.

PASSPORT TO MOSCOW (CITY)

LANGUAGE:

Russian

TRAVEL TIPS:

Taxi fares are negotiated before you begin travelling to your destination. Avoid taking unlicensed cabs, as these drivers are generally out to take advantage of foreigners.

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Sheremetyev International Airport

Airlines:

Emirates, Russian Airlines, Air India

CURRENCY:

Russian Ruble (US\$1 = 62.27 RUB)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- When entering a Russian home, it is absolutely imperative to remove your shoes. The host will provide some *tapochki* (slippers) to wear indoors.
- When meeting someone at the front door,

never shake hands over a threshold. Instead, wait until all are inside to do so.

- Do not buy and gift flowers in even numbers.

HOTELS:

The Ritz-Carlton, Moscow

www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Moscow

Swissotel Krasnye Holmy, Moscow

www.swissotel.com/hotels/moscow

Frabrika Hostel & Gallery

www.fabrika-hostel.ru

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

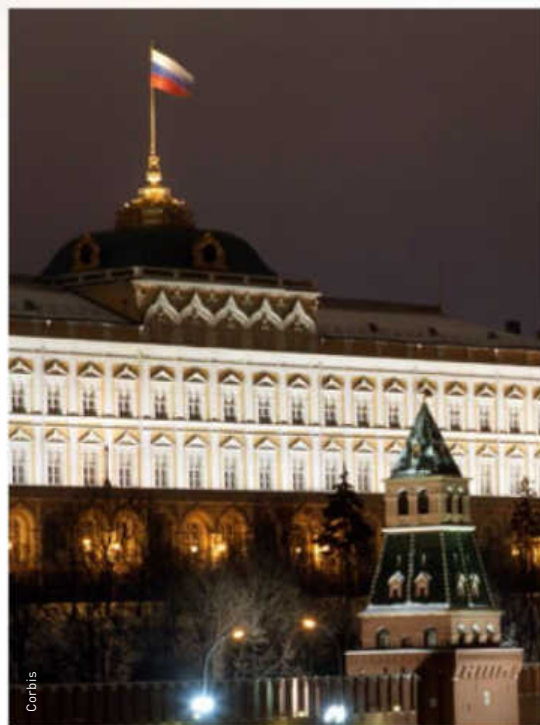
- Moscow Kremlin
- Bolshoi Theatre
- Dormition Cathedral

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

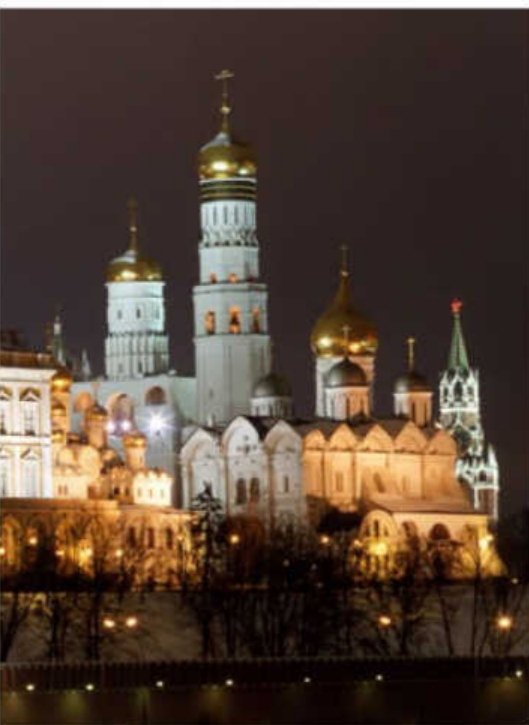
April and May

FESTIVALS:

- New Year's Day (Jan 1)
- Labour Day (May 1)
- National Day (Jun 15)



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PASSPORT TO ST. PETERSBURG (CITY) ▲

LANGUAGE:
Russian

TRAVEL TIPS:
The easiest way to get between downtown Moscow and St Petersburg's heart is by Sapsan high-speed express. The ride takes around 4 hours

GETTING THERE:
Main airports:
Pulkovo Airport
Airlines:
Russian Airlines, S7 Airlines,
Turkish Airlines

CURRENCY:
Russian Ruble (US\$1 = 62.27 RUB)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:
• If you happen to be wearing gloves, take them off when you shake hands.
• Do not turn up at someone's home empty-handed.

• Keep your cup half full if you're not keen on being served more alcohol.

HOTELS:
NashOTEL
www.nashotel.ru
Raddison Sonya Hotel
www.radisson.ru
Cubahostel
www.cubahostel.ru

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:
• The Hermitage Museum
• Andreyevsky Cathedral
• Mariinsky Theatre

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:
Late May to June

FESTIVALS:
• Orthodox Christmas Day (Jan 7)
• Victory Day (May 9)
• Constitution Day of Russia (Dec 12)



PASSPORT TO VLADIVOSTOK (CITY)

LANGUAGE:

Russian

TRAVEL TIPS:

Visitors are advised to do currency exchanges at the hotel or bank rather than going to independent moneychangers on the streets.

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Vladivostok International Airport

Airlines:

Korean Air, Singapore Airlines,
Cathay Pacific

CURRENCY:

Russian Ruble (US\$1 = 62.27 RUB)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Russians appreciate punctuality. Thus, business or even informal meetings generally start on time.
- If you're invited for dinner, do not make plans to leave later in the evening. You will

be expected to socialise after the meal.

- If you're female, do cover your head with a scarf before entering a Russian Orthodox church.

HOTELS:

Avanta

www.hotel-avanta.ru

Hyundai

www.hotelhyundai.ru

Optimum Hostel

www.hostel-optimum.ru

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Arsenyev Regional History Museum
- Primorsky State Art Gallery
- Golden Horn Bridge

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

August to September

FESTIVALS:

- Motherland Defender's Day (Feb 23)
- Labour Day (May 1)
- Unity Day (Nov 4)

PASSPORT TO TUVA ▼

LANGUAGE:

Tuvan

TRAVEL TIPS:

Credit cards are uncommon here so do prepare adequate cash. Also, always carry around an umbrella, as the weather is very unpredictable.

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Kyzyl Airport

Airlines:

Tuva Airlines, Russian Airlines

CURRENCY:

Russian Ruble (US\$1 = 62.27 RUB)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Throat singing is an ancient art in Tuva. Stopping to listen is a mark of appreciation.

- Do not use mobile phones during mealtimes.
- The offering of alcohol is a friendly gesture. Try not to refuse.

HOTELS:

Mongulek Hotel
Buyan Badyrgy Hotel
Odugen Hotel

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Ubsunur Hollow
- Bolshoy Yenisei River
- Todzha Lake

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

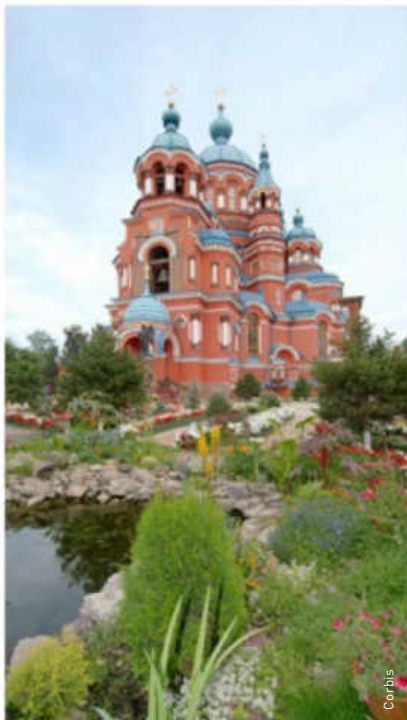
June to August

FESTIVALS:

- Shagaa (Feb 11)
- Naadym (Aug 15)
- Ustuu-huree (Jul)



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PASSPORT TO SIBERIA ▼

LANGUAGE:

Russian

TRAVEL TIPS:

Prepare a pair of good walking shoes, as most of the scenic areas are only accessible on foot.

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Tolmachevo Airport

Airlines:

Siberia Airlines, Russian Airlines

CURRENCY:

Russian Ruble (US\$1 = 62.27 RUB)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Always remove your shoes before entering a local's home.
- Females are expected to dress conservatively.
- At dinners, vodka is usually served before dinner starts and usually drunk in rounds.

Be prepared to give a toast on your host's hospitality or to your friendship.

HOTELS:

Hotel Pearl of Siberia

www.hotelslavtek.ru

International Hotel Sayen Irkutsk

www.sayen.ru

Azimut Hotel Siberia

www.azimuthotels.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Yenisei-Angara-Selenge River system
- Kamchatka
- Lake Baijal

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

June to August

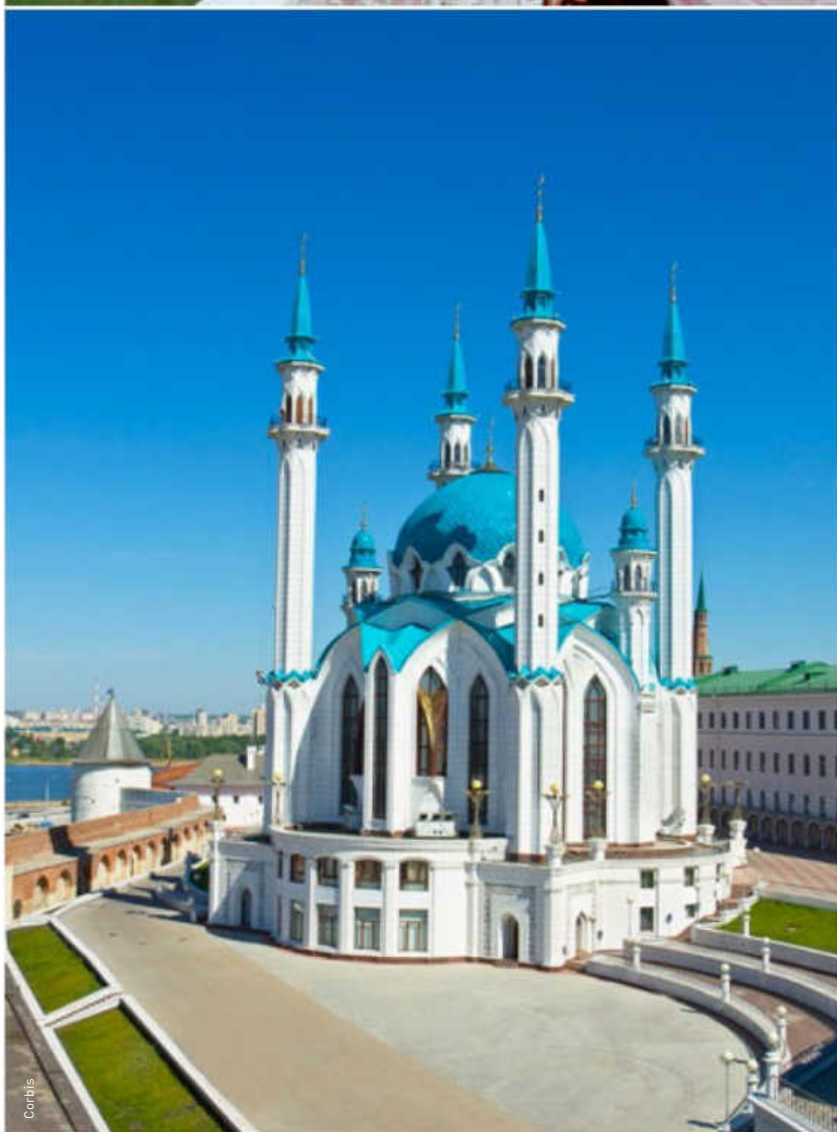
FESTIVALS:

- New Year's Day (Jan 1)
- Knowledge Day (Sep 1)
- Anniversary of the October Revolution (Nov 7)





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PASSPORT TO TATARSTAN ◀

LANGUAGE:

Tatar

TRAVEL TIPS:

Credit cards, including American Express, are widely accepted here.

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Kazan Airport

Airlines:

Tatarstan Airlines, Russian Airlines, Utair

CURRENCY:

Russian Ruble (US\$1 = 62.27 RUB)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- You will have to pay a small fee to use public restrooms in Tatarstan. Do not refuse as it is a sign of poor manners.
- Physical contact, such as hugs, is restricted to people of the same gender.
- Females are expected to dress conservatively before entering religious buildings.

HOTELS:

Korston Royal Hotel

www.korston.ru

Hotel It Park

www.itpark-kazan.ru

Kazan Hostel

www.kazan-hostel.ru

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Söyembikä Tower
- Qolşärif mosque
- Sviyazhsk island

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

August to September

FESTIVALS:

- New Year's Day (Jan 1)
- Russia Day (Jun 12)
- Day of the Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan (Nov 6)


YAMAL

UNVEILING SALEKHARD

THE SOUL OF RUSSIA

text

BY ALEKSEY ANISIMOV *Photos* BY SERGEY ANISIMOV

A photograph of a herd of reindeer in a tundra landscape. The reindeer are in the foreground, with their large, dark antlers prominent against a blue sky with light clouds. The ground is covered in low-lying, reddish-brown vegetation. In the background, there are rolling hills or mountains under a clear sky.

A herd of deer, pride of the family: Taken care by the men of the tribe, they are carefully watched at night to make sure none is lost





02

RUSSIA



02 The Stella 66th Parallel divides the city into two parts, making Salekhard the only city in the world located within the Arctic Circle – the monument marking the exact location of the Arctic Circle

03 Reindeer Herder's Day is a holiday commemorating its reindeer herders: On this day, the nomads come to the city to take part in competitions and showcase the culture of its people

04 Stroganina, a favourite dish among the traditional indigenous northern peoples: Prepared from frozen fish, it is cut into chips and served raw with sauce

It is not well known, I imagine, but Salekhard is officially stated to be the only city on Earth that lies within a polar circle. Why, we even have a monument endorsing this fact. Interestingly, this very spot, located at Stella, has been a favourite hangout of mine over the years. Amidst its glorious spaciousness, I will sit in the evenings and enjoy stunning sunsets that embrace the exceptional view of the tundra.

A symbol of the region's natural gas resources, Salekhard's Fakel ("Torch") Bridge, located on Knunantca Street 10 (ул. Кнунянца 10) over the river Shaytanka, also offers spectacular panoramic views. Elevators take visitors to the highest point on the bridge where a two-storey restaurant is suspended 60 metres above the river. It's an unusual vantage point to experience one of the highlights of Salekhard culture – the local cuisine.

Salekhard citizens are very proud of their cultural traditions. This is especially true of the indigenous people of the north that live on the tundra. Those who have made Salekhard home over the decades have learned their traditions; we eat the traditional food and some of the descendants of Salekhard settlers even speak the traditional language of the Nenets people, despite being daily speakers of Russian.

Art and design have flourished over the decades, as the people of Salekhard mature socially, becoming more open-minded and accepting. The city itself reflects this transformation, with buildings painted in myriad hues, a colourful backdrop to everyday life. International architects have set their sights on Salekhard and have already built several modern buildings. Very often these days, you can find large photographic banners on buildings across the city taken by accomplished national photographers.



03



04

MUST VISIT SPOTS:

NORD CITY NIGHTCLUB

Igarskaya str 25/4

COFFEE BLACK CAFÉ

Matrosova 35

PARADIZ (RESTAURANT)

Matrosova 33A

NOTEWORTHY IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Polaris Leisure Center

Chubinina Street

When it comes to appreciating the arts, singing and woodcraft are very popular, particularly among Salekhard's schoolchildren – their miniature handcrafted wooden reindeer and muskoxen statues are delightful. Artistic expression has also found form in yurts, the region's traditional tent-like dwellings, which are painted in national colours.

When I need inspiration, I go to the banks of the Ob river, one of Asia's great rivers. Bordering the cities of Salekhard and Labitnangi, the Ob flows north and west across western Siberia in a twisting diagonal from its source in the Altai Mountains to its outlet through the Gulf of Ob into the Kara Sea, part of the Arctic Ocean. The river is a major transportation artery, crossing territory in the heart of Russia that is extraordinarily varied in its physical environment and population. There is a small forest I go to where you can enjoy swimming, picnicking, and fishing – ending the day with a sunset that fills your heart and soul.

Despite the foreign influences, we still prefer our national fare, which you can find only if you visit Salekhard and the greater Yamal region. We eat a lot of reindeer meat, which is very healthy but rather expensive. We are very proud of this animal here in Yamal; it is a major part of our lives – we eat its meat, we make clothes from its skin, and we use it as a form of transport.

But we do have alternatives, of course. Fish is also very popular. We particularly love the muksun (*Coregonus muksun*), especially for *stroganina*, essentially frozen slices of raw fish dipped in salt. Reindeer breeders prefer it dipped in reindeer blood!

In the vicinity of Salekhard, one of my favourite places is the village of Gornoknyazevsk, which is situated on the right bank of the Ob river. It is home to an open-air ethnographic museum that was built in 2001





To date, the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District has the largest herd of reindeer in the world – at over 700,000. At the same time, the population of people in the region is a little more than half a million.

06 Chum, a portable conical-shaped home of the North: In winter, it is covered with deerskin

07 One of the streets within the city centre with administrative and residential buildings, as well as several cultural and entertainment centres

08 People in Yamal love the deer and consider the animal sacred: They are transport, food, clothing and sometimes, even income for the locals

PASSPORT TO YAMAL-NENETS AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT (NORTHWEST SIBERIA)

LANGUAGE:

Forest Nenets, Tundra Nenets

TRAVEL TIPS:

- If you get this far and are not going further north up the Yamal Peninsula, it may be worth checking out Salekhard's market as you will likely see a few Nenets reindeer herders dressed in their furs and with their sledges nearby.
- There are several major problems that have ensured that almost no travellers make it even as far as Salekhard, and even fewer travel on up the Yamal Peninsula.

GETTING THERE:

The access points to the Yamal from the rest of Russia are the towns of Labytnangi and Salekhard. Salekhard can be reached by boat from Omsk (on the Trans-Siberian Railway).

CURRENCY:

Russian Ruble (US\$1 = 59.66 RUB)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- There is a certain force in the Nenets worldview called *sya mei*. It is connected with the other world
- There are a remarkable number of taboos and restrictions on people affected by *sya mei*
- It would do you well to respect their beliefs

HOTELS:

Solnechniy 35
+7 349 229-56-56
Hotel Arktika
Ulitsa Respubliki 38
Metelitsa Hotel
Solnechniy Mikroraion 35

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

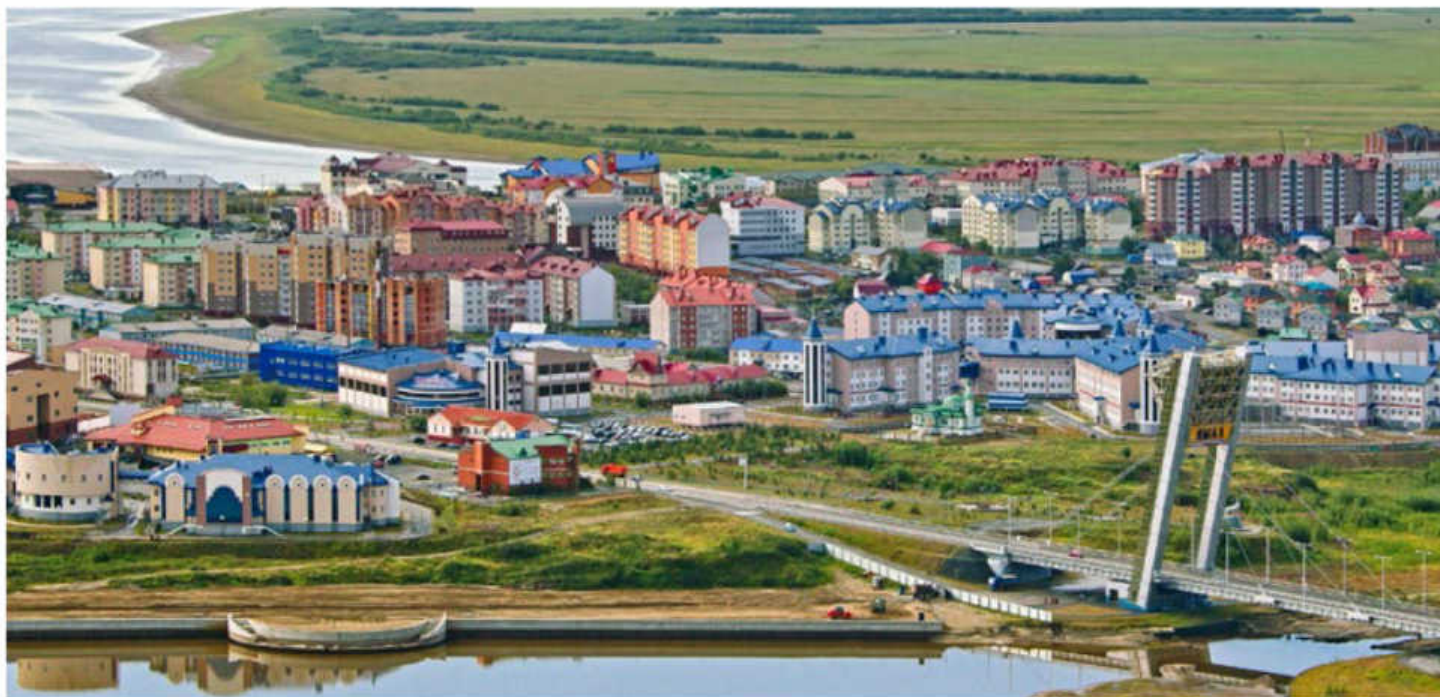
- Stela 66th Parallel
- Church of the Holy Apostles Petr and Pavel
- Obdorskiy Burg (Master's Town)

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

September

“Another sentimental favourite is Aksarka, a town and harbour on the southeastern shore of the lower reaches of the Ob river.”





09

MUST VISIT SPOTS:

NORD CITY NIGHTCLUB

Igarskaya str 25/4

COFFEE BLACK CAFÉ

Matrosova 35

PARADIZ (RESTAURANT)

Matrosova 33A

NOTEWORTHY IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Polaris Leisure Center

Chubina Street

09 A bird's eye view of the city: Over the past 20 years, the city has seen many changes

ALEKSEY ANISIMOV



Aleksey Anisimov lives in Salekhard, Russia. He works in Public Relations and manages the Global Arctic Awards international photography competition (www.arcticawards.ru). His love for regions in the north of the planet has brought him to many countries in the region, including places around Russia, the Ukraine and Europe.

SERGEY ANISIMOV



Sergey Anisimov fell in love with photography in 2004. Within the last five years, he has published five books devoted to these regions. He lives in the Polar Circle city of Salekhard. Winner of the "Golden Eye of Russia" in 2011, Sergey is also the organiser and President of the international photo contest, the Global Arctic Awards. www.anisimov-photo.com

on the ancestral lands of Ivan Tayshin, a local prince. This unique museum has a mission to preserve and develop the cultural heritage of the indigenous northern minorities. Making sense of the traditional tents and the free-roaming wild deer are the hostesses in national dress, taking visitors on an ancient journey through the Yamal region.

Another sentimental favourite is Aksarka, a town and harbour on the southeastern shore of the lower reaches of the Ob river. Fifty-five kilometres east of Salekhard, it was founded between 1930 and 1932 by immigrants from the Southern and Central Urals. There is a bus service to and from Salekhard.

Late March to early April is when this area really comes to life, as all the reindeer breeders get together for the annual Reindeer Herders' Day. It's a time for people from around the region to enjoy traditional food and music – and some friendly competition.

I must say, it is a far cry from how things used to be like way back when. In those days, communities kept to themselves, and people didn't go out much, preferring to stay at home with their families. Besides, there were few places around Salekhard where people could spend their leisure time, anyway.

These days, however, Salekhard's young people have an abundance of cinemas, concerts, cafés and bars to choose from, while the Ice Palace caters to the city's many fans of ice-skating. In wintertime, which lasts for eight months of the year, people take this passion outside, quite literally – a step outside one's house and it's skate city!

The people of Salekhard continue to cherish their customs and traditions; they are our pride and joy. Our food, our arts, our way of life – these traditions mean everything to us. And as we try to protect this heritage for future generations, we are proud to share it with the world. AGP



PASSPORT TO KAZAKHSTAN

LANGUAGES:

Kazakh is the state language, while Russian is the official language

TRAVEL TIPS:

Be sure to have exact change on you when taking a taxi.

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Almaty International Airport

Airlines:

Air Astana, Turkish Airlines, Etihad Airways

CURRENCY:

Kazakhstani Tenge (US\$1 = 187.057 KZT)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Remove your shoes at the door before stepping into someone's home.
- Do not refuse a cup of tea or a slice of bread from your host.
- Do not initiate physical contact (such as a hug) with a member of the opposite sex upon meeting them for the first time.

HOTELS:

The Ritz-Carlton, Almaty

www.ritzcarlton.com/Almaty

Rixos President Hotel Astana

<http://presidentastana.rixos.com>

The Dostyk Hotel

www.dostyk.kz

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

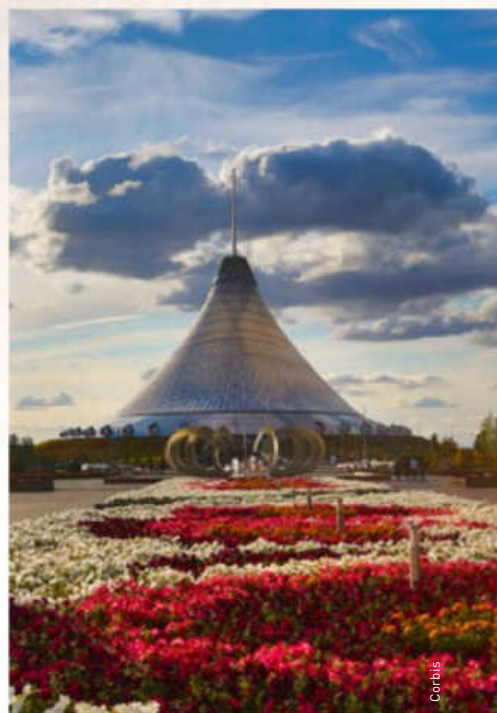
- Central State Museum
- Kok-Tobe
- Khan Shatyr

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

May to June (Spring) or September to November (Autumn)

FESTIVALS:

- Constitution Day (Aug 30)
- Day of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Dec 1)
- Independence Day (Dec 17)





PASSPORT TO UZBEKISTAN ►

LANGUAGES:

Uzbek (official language) and Russian

TRAVEL TIPS:

During the day the metro (underground train) is a good transport option, but it, is advisable to use taxi services after midnight.

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Tashkent International Airport

Airlines:

Uzbekistan Airways, Iran Air,
Asiana Airlines

CURRENCY:

Uzbekistani som (US\$1 = 2,570.23 UZS)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Remove your shoes at the door before entering someone's house or a holy site.
- Do not point your finger at a local as it is considered demeaning.
- Bring a small, non-alcoholic gift when invited to an Uzbek's home for dinner.

HOTELS:

Raddison Hotel, Tashkent

www.radissonblu.com/hotel-tashkent

Miran International Hotel

<http://miranhotel.com>

Amelia Luxury Boutique Hotel

www.hotelamelia.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Maghoki-Attar & Museum of Carpets
- Ark of Bukhars
- Registan

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

March to June

FESTIVALS:

- Independence Day (Sep 1)
- Eid al-Adha or Feast of the Sacrifice (Sep 23)
- Constitution Day (Dec 8)





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PASSPORT TO TAJIKISTAN ▲

LANGUAGES:

Tajik and Russian

TRAVEL TIPS:

Hiring a vehicle with a local driver is the best and safest way to travel around the country.

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Dushanbe International Airport

Airlines:

Tajik Air, Somon Air, Turkish Airlines

CURRENCY:

Tajikistani Somoni (US\$1 = 6.26 TJS)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Dress modestly and conservatively.
- Do not take photos of government, public or military buildings.
- Do not show the soles of your feet when sitting down.

HOTELS:

Hyatt Regency Dushanbe Hotel

www.dushanbe.regency.hyatt.com

Serena Hotel Dushanbe

www.serenahotels.com/serenadushanbe

Hotel Mercury

www.hotel-mercury.tj

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Iskanderkul
- Sarez Lake
- National Museum of Tajikistan

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

September

FESTIVALS:

- Independence Day (September 9)
- Eid al-Adha or Feast of the Sacrifice (September 23)
- Constitution Day (Dec 25)



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PASSPORT TO TURKMENISTAN ▼

LANGUAGES:

Turkmen and Russian

TRAVEL TIPS:

Visitors are strongly advised to hire a private car and driver through their travel agency or hotel for safety reasons.

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Ashgabat International Airport

Airlines:

Turkmenistan Airlines, Qatar Airways, Singapore Airlines

CURRENCY:

Turkmenistani Manat (US\$1 = 3.5 TMT)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Remove your shoes before entering a mosque or other religious buildings.
- Do not point a finger at a local as this is considered accusatory.
- Remember to give your host a compliment

when invited to their home for dinner.

HOTELS:

Ak Altyn Hotel

www.akaltyn.com

Berkarar

www.dntours-business.com/berkarar-hotel-awaza-turkmenistan

Grand Turkmen Hotel

www.tm-tur.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Ashgabat National Museum of History
- Repetek Biosphere State Reserve
- Turkmen Carpet Museum

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

Mid-April to June

FESTIVALS:

- Kurban Bayramy or Feast of the Sacrifice (Sep 24–26)
- Independence Day (Oct 28)
- Neutrality Day or National Day (Dec 12)

PASSPORT TO KYRGYZSTAN ▲

LANGUAGES:

Kyrgyz and Russian

TRAVEL TIPS:

Taxis are a cheap and safe alternative to renting a private car.

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Manas International Airport

Airlines:

Air Kyrgyzstan, Air Astana, Singapore Airlines

CURRENCY:

Kyrgyzstani Som (US\$1 = 62.75 KGS)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Greet someone with a warm hello in the local language upon meeting for the first time.
- As a sign of respect, use both hands when shaking hands.
- When staying in a yurt, sleep with your feet pointing towards the door.

HOTELS:

Hyatt Regency Bishkek Hotel

www.bishkek.regency.hyatt.com

Golden Dragon Hotel Bishkek

www.gdhotel.kg/en

Jannat Regency Hotel

www.jannat.kg

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Issyk Kul
- Osh Bazaar
- Burana Tower

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

June to September for northern Kyrgyzstan and March to October for southern Kyrgyzstan

FESTIVALS:

- Independence Day (Aug 31)
- Kurman Ait or Feast of the Sacrifice (Sep 23)
- Social Revolution Day (Nov 7)



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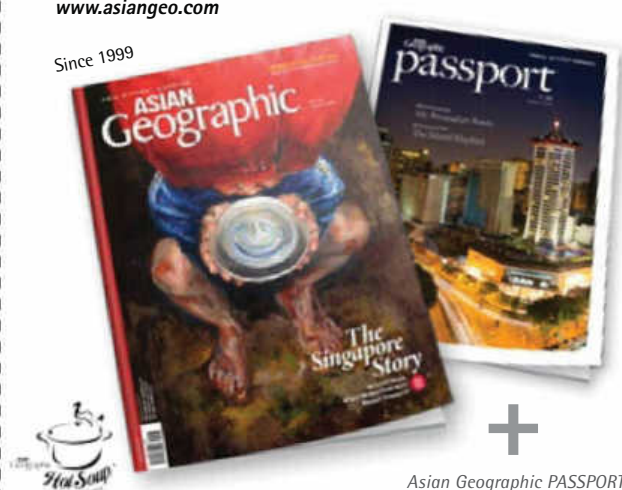
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Oceania

PASSPORT TO AUSTRALIA

LANGUAGES:

English and Australian Aboriginal languages (e.g. Waramungu)

TRAVEL TIPS:

The Australian sun is very strong. Always wear a shirt, hat, sunglasses and SPF 30+ sunscreen lotion, even on cloudy days.

GETTING THERE:

Main airports:

Canberra International Airport, Sydney Airport, Melbourne Airport, Gold Coast Airport, Perth Airport

Airlines:

Qantas, Virgin Australia, Emirates

CURRENCY:

Australian dollar (US\$1 = 1.28 AUD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- A handshake is the preferred greeting.
- In Australia, the "V-for-Victory" sign needs to be done with the palm facing

out. The palm-facing-in version is an insulting gesture.

- Do not eat with your hands.

HOTELS:

Park Hyatt Sydney

www.sydney.park.hyatt.com

The Hotel Windsor, Melbourne

www.thehotelwindsor.com.au

Canberra City YHA

www.yha.com.au

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Lake Burley Griffin
- Sydney Opera House
- Yarra Valley

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

Late September to early December and late February

FESTIVALS:

- Australia Day (Jan 26)
- Easter Monday (Apr 6)
- Queen's Birthday (Jun 8)



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KIRIBATI

COOK
ISLANDS



PASSPORT TO COCOS KEELING ISLANDS (TERRITORY) ▲

LANGUAGE:

English, although it is common for the Cocos Malay community living on Home Island to communicate in a local Malay dialect

TRAVEL TIPS:

Cocos Islands is the only place in the world where you can walk the entire atoll on foot, so do bring a good pair of sandals/slippers and sunscreen

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Cocos Islands Airport

Airlines:

Virgin Australia

CURRENCY:

Australian dollar (US\$1 = 1.28 AUD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Dress modestly, with shoulders and knees covered.
- Entry into a mosque requires the company of a Cocos Malay person.

- Ask permission before photographing residents.

HOTELS:

Cocos Village Bungalows
www.cocosvillagebungalows.com

Cocos Castaway
www.cocoscastaway.com

My Island Home
www.cocosaccommodation.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Big Barge Art Centre
- Pulu Keeling National Park
- Cocos Clam Farm

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

November to April

FESTIVALS:

- Easter Monday (Apr 6)
- Hari Raya Puasa (Jul 17)
- Cocos Keeling Islands Lagoon Swim (Nov 14)

PASSPORT TO NEW ZEALAND

LANGUAGES:

English and Maori

TRAVEL TIPS:

Most shops have Eftpos (Electronic Funds Transfer at Point of Sale) terminals for debit and credit cards, so most purchases can be made electronically.

GETTING THERE:

Main airports:

Auckland Airport, Rotorua International Airport, Palmerston North Airport, Christchurch International Airport

Airlines:

Air New Zealand, Jet Airways, Singapore Airlines

CURRENCY:

New Zealand dollar (US\$1 = 1.34 NZD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Put your fork and knife parallel on the plate with the handles facing to the right when you are done eating.
- Do not enter a *marae* (a sacred place that serves both social and religious purposes in Maori society) without seeking permission.
- In Maori culture, it is considered rude to eat before the food has been blessed.

HOTELS:

Bolton Hotel

www.boltonhotel.co.nz

Millennium Hotel Queenstown

www.millenniumhotels.co.nz

Travelodge Hotel Wellington

www.tfehotels.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- White Island
- Takapūwāhia Marae
- Waitomo Caves

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

February to April

FESTIVALS:

- Waitangi Day (Feb 6)
- Taranaki Anniversary (Mar 9)
- Queen's Birthday (Jun 1)



PASSPORT TO NORFOLK ISLAND (TERRITORY)

LANGUAGE:

English, however, Norfolk is widely spoken among the islanders as well

TRAVEL TIPS:

There is no public transport system on Norfolk Island. While it is possible to walk the length and breadth of it, most visitors hire a car, which will cost approximately US\$45 a day.

GETTING THERE:

Airport :

Norfolk Island Airport

Airlines:

Air New Zealand, British Airways, Garuda Indonesia

CURRENCY:

Australian dollar (US\$1 = 1.28 AUD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Tipping is not expected on Norfolk Island, however, giving a small tip (10% of the bill) in a restaurant is in order if the service is exceptionally good.
- Greet new people with a warm *Watawieh Yorly* (meaning "how are you") to make a good impression.
- Do not photograph religious buildings without seeking permission first.

HOTELS:

The Tin Sheds

www.tinshedsnorfolkisland.com

Rocky Point Lodge

www.rockypointlodge.com.au

Hibiscus Crown

www.hibiscuscrown.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Sunday Markets in the Bicentennial Complex (open every Sunday morning)
- St Barnabas Chapel
- Pitcairn Settlers Village

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

March or August

FESTIVALS:

- Foundation Day (Mar 6)
- Bounty Anniversary Day (Jun 8)
- Queen's Birthday (Jun 15)



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PASSPORT TO FIJI (MELANESIA: ISLAND COUNTRY)

LANGUAGES:

English, Fijian and Fiji Hindi

TRAVEL TIPS:

Buses are efficient and inexpensive in Fiji. The 4-hour journey from Suva to Nadi on the main island costs just US\$22.

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Nausori Airport and Nadi

International Airport

Airlines:

Fiji Airways, Korean Air, Qantas Airways (operated by Fiji Airways)

CURRENCY:

Fijian dollar (US\$1 = 2.04FJD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Beach attire should be confined to the beach.
- When visiting towns and villages, be sure to cover up the shoulders. *Sulus*, dresses and bottoms should be at least of knee-length.
- When making a request, be sure to say *vinaka* (meaning "please" or "thank you").

HOTELS:

Likuliku Lagoon Resort

www.likulikulagoon.com

Uprising Beach Resort

www.uprisingbeachresort.com

Bamboo Backpackers

www.bambootravellers.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Denerau Island Complex
- Fiji Museum
- Sigatoka Sand Dunes

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

June to beginning of September

FESTIVALS:

- Prophet Mohammed's Birthday (Jan 5)
- Fiji Day (Oct 10)
- Diwali (Nov 11)

PASSPORT TO SOLOMON ISLANDS (MELANESIA: ISLAND COUNTRY) COUNTRY) ▶

LANGUAGE:

English is the official language of Solomon Islands, but Pijin is spoken by about half the population

TRAVEL TIPS:

All major credit cards (Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus) are accepted in the Solomons

GETTING THERE:

Main airports:

Honiara International Airport

Airlines:

Solomon Airlines, Qantas, China Eastern Airways

CURRENCY:

Solomon Islands Dollar (US\$1 = 7.78SMB)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Beachwear is acceptable at hotels and resorts but not when out shopping in towns and visiting villages
- Always ask for permission before taking photos of people and/or religious buildings
- Tipping is not recommended

HOTELS:

Sanbis Resort

www.sanbisresort.com

Pacific Casino Hotel

www.pacificcasinohotel.com

Agnes Lodge

www.agneslodge.com.sb

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Rennell Island
- Tenaru Falls
- Marovo Lagoon

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

April to November

FESTIVALS:

- Easter Sunday (Apr 5, 2015)
- Independence Day (Jul 7, 2015)
- National Day of Thanksgiving (Dec 26, 2015)



PASSPORT TO PAPUA NEW GUINEA (MELANESIA: ISLAND COUNTRY) COUNTRY)

LANGUAGES:

English, Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu

TRAVEL TIPS:

Swimming is generally not advised except at higher elevations due to a large number of saltwater crocodiles living in freshwater lakes and rivers as well as coastal waters

GETTING THERE:

Main airports:

Port Moresby International Airport

Airlines:

Singapore Airlines, Asiana Airlines, Thai Airways Note: All of these flights include a layover time

CURRENCY:

Papua New Guinean Kina (US\$1 = 2.62 PGK)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Greeting new people with a friendly handshake is very important
- It is a sign of respect not to make eye contact

- It is considered rude to take food from a fellow diner's plate

HOTELS:

Airways Hotel

www.airways.com.pg

Grand Papua Hotel

www.grandpapuahotel.com.pg

Tufi Resort

www.tufidive.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Sepik River
- Kokoda Track
- Rabaul Caldera

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

May to July

FESTIVALS:

- National Remembrance Day (Jul 23)
- National Day of Repentance (Aug 26)
- Independence Day (Sep 16)

PASSPORT TO COOK ISLANDS (POLYNESIA: ISLAND COUNTRY)

LANGUAGES:

English and Rarotongan

TRAVEL TIPS:

There are ATM facilities in Rarotonga and Aitutaki, but none on the other islands.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Rarotonga International Airport

Airlines:

Air Rarotonga, Air New Zealand, Air Tahiti

CURRENCY:

Cook Islands Dollar (US\$1 = 1.34 CKD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Respect religious habits; especially that nearly everything is closed on Sundays.
- Camping on beaches is not allowed.
- Do not poke fun at traditional customs, such as weaving and carving.

HOTELS:

The Sunset Resort

www.thesunsetresort.com

Samade on the Beach

www.samadebeach.com

Raina Beach Apartments

www.raina.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Tapuaetai
- Cook Islands Cultural Village
- Aroa Marine Reserve

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

Year-round

MAJOR FESTIVALS:

- ANZAC Day (Apr 25)
- The Sovereign's Birthday (Jun 1)
- Constitution Day (Aug 4)

PASSPORT TO VANUATU (MELANESIA: ISLAND NATION)

LANGUAGES:

English and Bislama

TRAVEL TIPS:

Credit and debit cards on the major networks (Cirrus, Maestro, etc) are accepted by many businesses in town

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Bauerfield International Airport

Airlines:

Air Vanuatu, Virgin Australia, Qantas

CURRENCY:

Vanuatu vatu (US\$1 = 107.54 VUV)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- It is considered impolite to bargain aggressively when shopping.
- Physical contact among members of the opposite sex is frowned upon.

- Exchanging of gifts is common in local tradition.

HOTELS:

Grand Hotel and Casino

www.grandvanuatu.com

Iririki Island Resort

www.iririki.com

Moorings Hotel

www.mooringsvanuatu.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Mount Yasur
- National Museum of Vanuatu
- Champagne Beach

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

May to October

FESTIVALS:

- Custom Chief's Day (Mar 5)
- Independence Day (Jul 30)
- Assumption Day (Aug 15)



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PASSPORT TO KIRIBATI (MICRONESIA: ISLAND COUNTRY)

LANGUAGES:

English and Kiribati

TRAVEL TIPS:

Most shops only accept cash as credit cards are rarely used

GETTING THERE:

Airports:

Bonriki International Airport and Cassidy International Airport

Airlines:

Air Kiribati, Fiji Airways, Air Marshall Islands

CURRENCY:

Kiribati Dollar (US\$1 = 1.28 KBD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Always be polite towards the elderly as they are respected greatly here.
- Dismount from your push bike or motorcycle as you pass a *Mwaniebwa* (large meeting house) that has a *bootaki* (meeting) in session.

- If you want to photograph an ongoing I-Kiribati celebration, be very careful not to interrupt.

HOTELS:

Lagoon Breeze Lodge
www.lagoonbreezelodge.com
Betio Lodge
www.betio-lodge.com
Mary's Motel
www.marysmotelarawa.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Marakei
- Butaritari
- Te Umanibong

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

March through October

FESTIVALS:

- Women's Day (Mar 9)
- National Day (Jul 12)
- Senior Citizens' Day (Jul 16)

PASSPORT TO PALAU (MICRONESIA: ISLAND COUNTRY)

LANGUAGES:

English and Palauan

TRAVEL TIPS:

Rainfall occurs throughout the year, thus, it is advisable to carry an umbrella at all times

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Koror Airport

Airlines:

China Airlines, Asiana Airlines, United Airlines

CURRENCY:

United States Dollars

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Rude remarks or any form of negating the local culture will not be taken kindly.
- Littering is considered highly offensive.
- Do not be overzealous about promoting feminist ideas.

HOTELS:

Palau Royal Resort
www.palau-royal-resort.com
Airai Water Paradise and Spa Babeldaob
www.airaiwaterparadise.com
Comfort Suite Hotel
www.peci-palau.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Jellyfish Lake
- Belau National Museum
- Malakal Island

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

September to May, particular for scuba diving

FESTIVALS:

- Youth Day (Mar 15)
- Senior Citizens' Day (May 5)
- President's Day (Jun 1)

PASSPORT TO MARSHALL ISLANDS (MICRONESIA: ISLAND COUNTRY)

LANGUAGES:

English and Marshallese

TRAVEL TIPS:

There is a plethora of taxis available on the main road that travels the length of Majuro Atoll

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Majuro International Airport

Airlines:

Air Marshall Islands, United Airlines

CURRENCY:

United States Dollar

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Nudity is not appreciated.
- Snorkelling and swimming should be done with as minimal bare skin exposed as possible.
- Do not photograph religious buildings

unless you have obtained permission to do so.

HOTELS:

Eneko Island Bungalows

www.enekoisland.com

Arnold Beachcomber Lodge

www.arnobeachcomber.com

Marshall Islands Resort

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Alele Museum
- Kalalin Pass
- Arno Atoll

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

January to March

FESTIVALS:

- National Day (Mar 1)
- Dri-jerbal Day (Sep 4)
- Manit Day (Sep 25)

PASSPORT TO NAURU (MICRONESIA: ISLAND COUNTRY) ▼

LANGUAGES:

English and Nauruan

TRAVEL TIPS:

Cash transactions are the norm as credit cards are rarely accepted here

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Nauru International Airport

Airlines:

Nauru Airlines

CURRENCY:

Australian Dollar (US\$1 = 1.28 AUD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- A warm, firm handshake is a mark of respect.
- Littering the beaches is strictly prohibited.
- Seek permission first before photographing residents.

HOTELS:

Menen Hotel Nauru

www.menenhotelnauru.com

Od'n Aiwo Hotel

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Anibare Bay
- Buada Lagoon
- Command Ridge

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

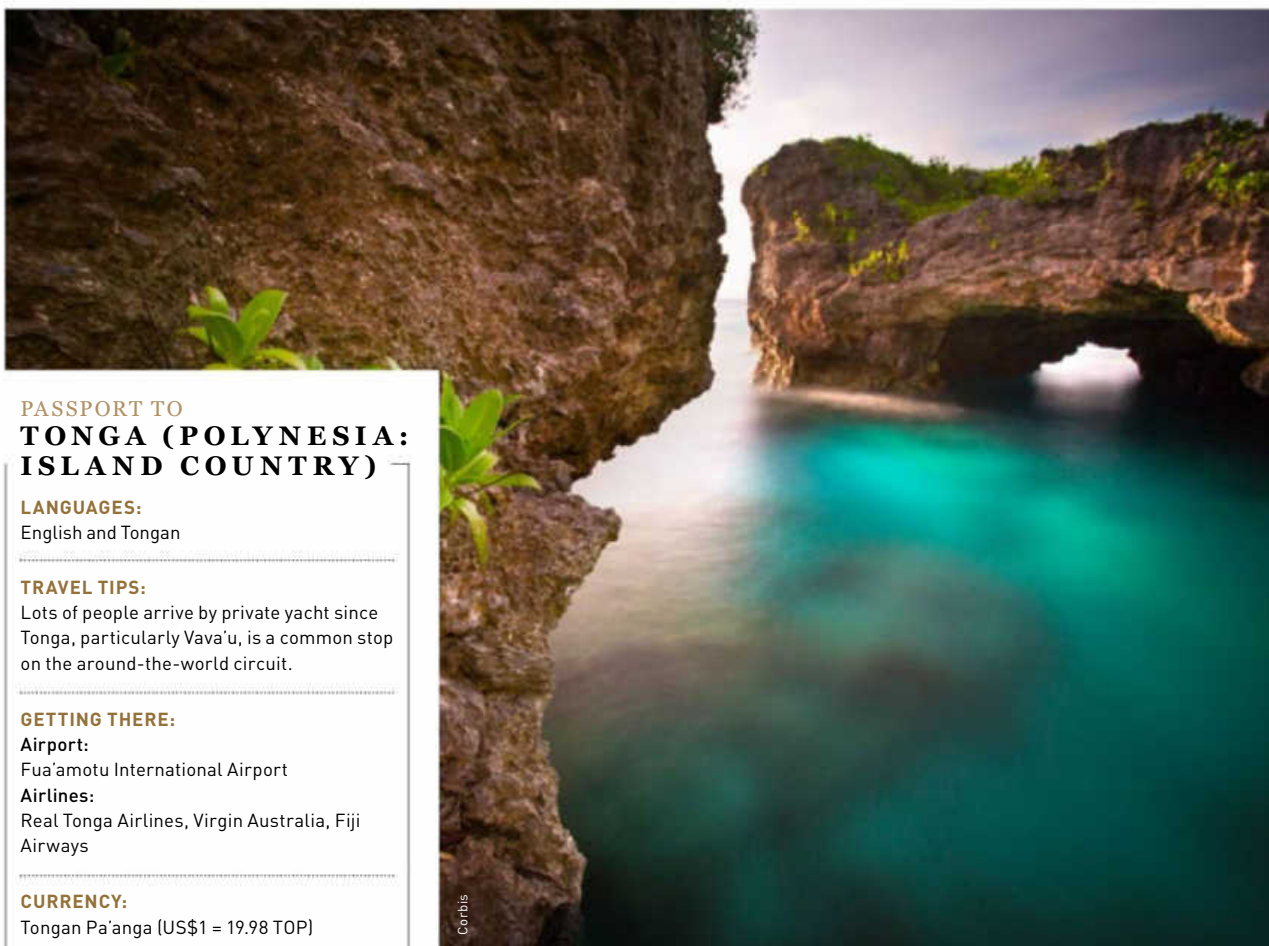
March to October

FESTIVALS:

- Independence Day (Jan 31)
- Easter Monday (Apr 6)
- Constitution Day (May 17)



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PASSPORT TO TONGA (POLYNESIA: ISLAND COUNTRY)

LANGUAGES:

English and Tongan

TRAVEL TIPS:

Lots of people arrive by private yacht since Tonga, particularly Vava'u, is a common stop on the around-the-world circuit.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Fua'amotu International Airport

Airlines:

Real Tonga Airlines, Virgin Australia, Fiji Airways

CURRENCY:

Tongan Pa'anga (US\$1 = 19.98 TOP)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Keep ankles covered for maximum respect.
- Tops should be kept on everywhere except at the beach.
- When offered *kava* (a traditional drink) by a local, do not refuse.

HOTELS:

Kolovai Beach Resort

www.kolovaibeach.com

Little Italy Hotel

www.littleitalytonga.com

Scenic Hotel Tonga

www.scenichotels.co.nz

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Ha'amonga 'a Maui
- 'Ene'io Botanical Garden
- Hufangalupe

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

Year-round

MAJOR FESTIVALS :

- ANZAC Day (Apr 25)
- Emancipation Day (Jun 8)
- National Day (Nov 2)

PASSPORT TO NIUE (POLYNESIA: ISLAND COUNTRY) ▲

LANGUAGES:

English and Niue

TRAVEL TIPS:

There are some taxis available, but their hours are variable and depend upon demand. Check upon arrival with the Niue Tourism Office for details.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Niue International Airport

Airlines:

Cathay Pacific, Air New Zealand, China Southern

CURRENCY:

New Zealand Dollar (US\$1 = 1.34 NZD)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Fishing, Kayaking and diving is prohibited by law on Sundays as this is a special day reserved for Niue's strong church-going population.

- Do not swim nude or topless.
- Refusing an offer of dinner or a drink can be considered offensive.

HOTELS:

Scenic Matavai Resort Niue

www.scenichotels.co.nz

Peleni's Guest House

www.pelenistravel.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Vaikona Chasm
- Hio Beach
- Avaiki Cave

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

Year-round

MAJOR FESTIVALS :

- Takai Commission Holiday (Jan 2)
- Waitangi Day (Feb 6)
- Queen's Birthday (Jun 1)

PASSPORT TO SAMOA (POLYNESIA: ISLAND COUNTRY)

LANGUAGES:

English and Samoan

TRAVEL TIPS:

Tipping is not practised or expected in Samoa.

GETTING THERE:

Airport:

Faleolo International Airport

Airlines:

Samoa Air, Virgin Australia

CURRENCY:

Samoa Tala (US\$1 = 2.48 WST)

CULTURAL DOS AND DON'TS:

- Speaking a few words of Samoan can endear you to the locals.
- Avoid walking through villages on Sunday as it is considered a holy day.
- Women should never go topless at the beach.

HOTELS:

Sinalei Resort

www.sinalei.com

Amanaki Hotel

www.amanakihotel.com

Aggie Grey's Hotel & Bungalows

www.aggiegreys.com

TOP 3 MUST-VISIT PLACES:

- Vaikona Chasm
- Hio Beach
- Avaiki Cave

BEST TIMES TO TRAVEL:

May to October

MAJOR FESTIVALS:

- Easter Monday (Apr 6)
- Mother's Day (May 11)
- Independence Day (Jun 1)

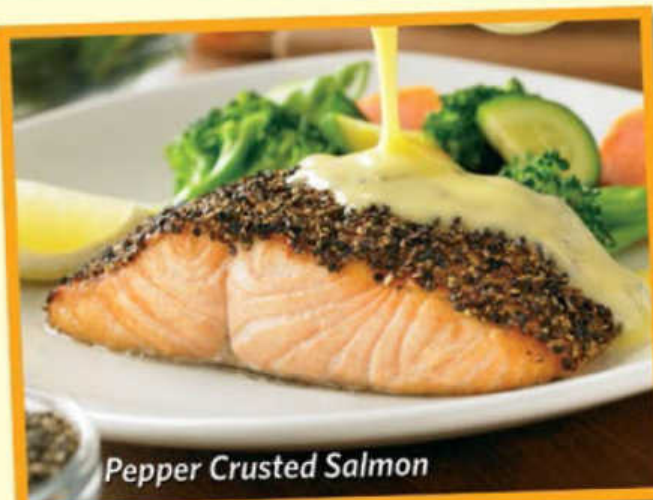


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without a visa



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travel to **167** countries
without a visa



4

SOUTH KOREA

Can travel to **166** countries
without a visa



5

MALAYSIA

Access to **163** countries
without a visa

Top 5 Least Powerful Passports In The World

ASIA



1

AFGHANISTAN

Passport holders can travel to
only **28** countries without a visa



2

IRAQ

Passport holders can
travel to **31** countries
without a visa



3

PAKISTAN

Passport holders can
travel to **32** countries
without a visa



4

PALESTINE

Passport holders can
travel to **36** countries
without a visa



5

NEPAL

Passport holders can
travel to **37** countries
without a visa

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TURKEY

37.8 million visitors

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28.4 million visitors

THAILAND

26.5 million visitors

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